

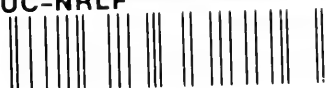
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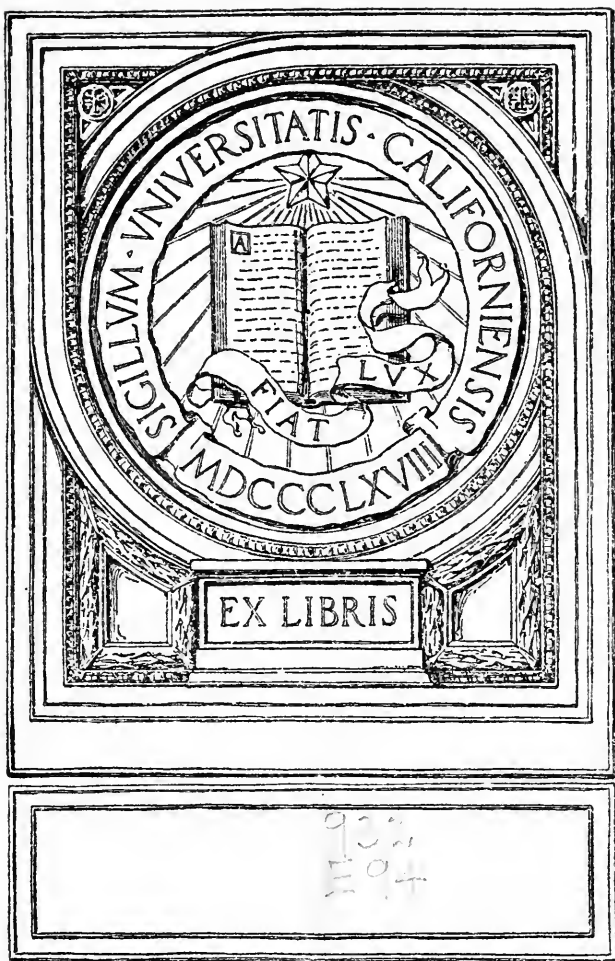
BY

ALFRED EWEN

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SHAKESPEARE

Miniature Series of Great Writers

Edited by G. C. WILLIAMSON, Litt.D.

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PORTRAIT OF SHAKESPEARE BY MARTIN DROESHOUT.

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Short Monographs on Great Writers

SHAKESPEARE

BY

ALFRED EWEN



LONDON

G. BELL & SONS, LTD.

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NOTE

IN preparing a series of Great Writers, it is evident that the foremost name upon the list must be that of the noblest poet the world has ever known; so it would seem, at first sight, to follow as a matter of course that in order to do adequate justice to so stupendous a theme the services of some author of the highest repute and authority should be employed. But here a difficulty arises: whole libraries have been written upon the subject from the literary, artistic, aesthetic, dramatic, metaphysical, and indeed all conceivable points of view, so that a new book on Shakespeare must almost inevitably begin with an apology. The editor of this series, bearing in mind that it is "designed for the benefit of the large class of readers who are interested in English literature, and is intended to supply at a minimum expenditure of time and money a sound general knowledge of the lives of our greatest writers, and of the nature and character of their writings," has intrusted the task to one

who, although an unknown student in the school of Shakespeare, is yet a devout lover of the poet; and the idea of this little book is to show how any ordinary person who will take ordinary trouble may obtain a priceless possession—a charm against weariness—an incentive to effort—and a mental culture of the kind most applicable to the needs of our complex and ever-changing civilization.

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THE LIFE OF SHAKESPEARE

EARLY in the sixteenth century a certain Richard Shakespeare farmed some land near the village of Snitterfield, about four miles north of Stratford-on-Avon. His son John Shakespeare, the father of the poet, left his home in 1551 and settled in the neighbouring town, where he began to carry on business on his own account. This business has been variously described as that of a general dealer and speculator in agricultural produce, a butcher, a wool-merchant, a tanner, and a glover. Probably all these traditions are more or less correct; thus he might, at different times, buy sheep as a dealer, kill and sell the carcasses as a butcher, dispose of the fleeces as a wool-merchant, prepare the skins as a tanner, and manufacture them into gloves as a glover.

His temperament appears to have been energetic but over-sanguine: the former being shown by the extensive nature of his business, his advantageous marriage, the property he purchased, the various public offices in the town which he successfully filled; while the latter is indicated by the financial straits into which he subsequently fell, and from which he was ex-

tricated by his famous son. From his father Shakespeare no doubt derived his business tact, his energy, and, perhaps also, a touch of that over-confidence which resulted in the pecuniary difficulties of the father, and the spiritual bankruptcy which at one time threatened to overwhelm the son.

In or about the autumn of 1557 John Shakespeare married Mary Arden, the youngest daughter of Robert Arden, a farmer of considerable wealth who lived at Wilmcote, near Stratford. Robert Arden had died in the previous year (1556), leaving to his daughter Mary £6 13s. 4d. in money, and also certain property known as Ashbies, in the village of Wilmcote, namely a house with fifty acres of land at the annual rental of £28. She was also entitled to an interest in two houses at Snitterfield, so that from a monetary point of view the match was an eminently desirable one for the young Stratford trader, as it must be remembered that the estimated purchasing power of money was then approximately eight times more than it is now.

The greatest interest always attaches to the mothers of great men: it is important therefore to note that the Ardens were of gentle blood, representing one of the most ancient and important Warwickshire families. One member thereof, Edward Arden, was High Sheriff in 1575. The name is also connected with a district in the northern part of the county, formerly of great extent, known as the Forest of Arden. It occurs also in the name of the village Henley in Arden,

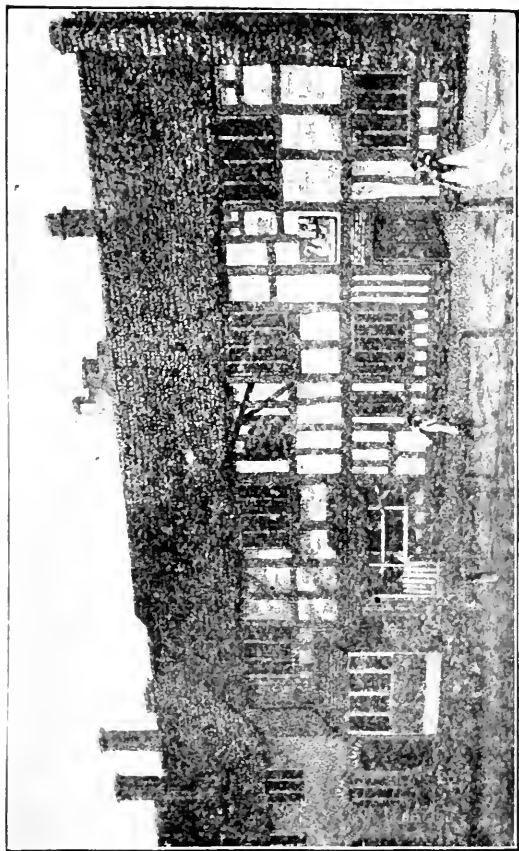
and thus would not easily have been forgotten even if the poet had not immortalized it in "As You Like It." Round the maiden name of the mother of Shakespeare cling fragrant memories which "the world will not willingly let die."

It is generally believed that in 1564 John and Mary Shakespeare were residing in a house in Henley Street, Stratford, which was then rented, and afterwards purchased, by John Shakespeare, and there on the 22nd or 23rd April was born their eldest son, who, according to the Parish Register, was baptized and named William on the 26th April, 1564. The actual day of his birth is doubtful, but children were then baptized as soon after birth as possible, so that the 23rd April, which is throughout the civilized world celebrated as the birthday of the poet, is no doubt approximately correct, and by a somewhat curious coincidence he died upon the anniversary of the same day. Although the remark may be trite and in one sense commonplace, it is impossible to pass on without recalling the debt the world owes to those who, by the providence of God, became the earthly parents of Shakespeare, and under whose care and love the child "grew in wisdom and in stature." We are reminded more especially of this obligation when reading that in July, 1564, the baby being then three months old, the plague raged with great virulence and celerity through the town of Stratford. Although sanitary precautions were then in their infancy, the solicitude of the parents, together with the comparative healthfulness of the situation of the house in

Henley Street, prevented the fatal red cross from being daubed upon the doors of Shakespeare's birthplace. It may be that John Shakespeare had been taught the duty of cleanliness by an experience which happened to him in April, 1552, when he was fined twelpence for permitting a dirt heap to accumulate in front of his house.

With regard to the family of John and Mary Shakespeare it may be stated that, though William was the eldest son, he was the third child, two daughters, who died in infancy, having preceded him. After him came Gilbert, Richard, and Edmund—then Joan. These four children lived to attain maturity, but the last child, Ann, lived only about seven years. Gilbert was baptized 13th October, 1566, so that for two years and a half William was the sole occupant of the household cradle and monopolized all the loving attention of his mother. The worldly circumstances of the family were at this time prosperous.

John Shakespeare was busily engaged with public and private affairs, so it is pleasant to picture the young, gentle, and beautiful mother wandering about the grassy meads and quaint streets, at first carrying her precious burden in her arms and afterwards guiding his toddling footsteps. A short walk from home would bring her into the main street, which formed part of the old Roman highroad from London to Birmingham and Chester. The street was broad, and flanked on either side by picturesque houses with overhanging gables. Nearly every house had its garden back and front, which in summer-



SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTHPLACE IN 1806.

From Wheeler's "Stratford."

THE
ANNALS

time would be gay with flowers. In the centre of the town stood the market cross, while the Guildhall, the Grammar School, and the noble Church dominated the smaller buildings. The Avon flowed placidly past the town, and we can watch the mother lifting up her babe to see it, as she crosses the stately bridge built by Sir Hugh Clopton on her way to the meadows beyond, where she could wander by the riverside, calling the child's attention to the swans, the flowers, and the birds.

When he was old enough, namely, in 1571, Shakespeare was sent to the Grammar School at Stratford, the master at that time being one Walter Roche. It was here he learnt "the small Latin and less Greek" alluded to by Ben Jonson, his friend and rival. The question of Shakespeare's attainments has been keenly debated. Some writers credit him with a knowledge of Latin, Greek, French, and Italian; and when confronted with the fact that he was for a few years only a pupil at a small provincial grammar school, they allege that he pursued all these studies subsequently. Others deny him almost any education at all. So the dispute goes on, while to any one who will give the matter careful consideration there seems but little difficulty in arriving at what is doubtless the truth. Ben Jonson was an accomplished classical scholar, so from his point of view Shakespeare very likely had "small Latin and less Greek"; but the knowledge of Latin gained in his early years would be quite enough to enable him easily to pick up such

French and Italian as appears in his plays, while it is also overlooked that when a playwright uses a foreign language in his plays it does not at all follow that he has any personal knowledge of it. That Shakespeare spoke French is argued from certain scenes in "Henry V," but it was the easiest thing in the world, if he thought a little French here and there would give local colour, to write what he wanted in English and ask a friend to translate it. The same applies to any other language; and when we consider that at the height of his success many of his fellow dramatists were university and travelled men, and that his friends included some of the most cultured and scholarly men of the period, any deductions drawn from the scraps of foreign languages in the plays are quite beside the mark.

It is, however, further argued that his writings show an acquaintance with the works of the Greek and Latin poets and modern French and Italian authors; but when the translations then so much in vogue have been taken into account, the similarity of thought which doubtless exists can be accounted for, as far as the classical authors are concerned, by remembering that "great minds think alike," and as regards the modern authors, *e.g.* Montaigne, by considering that such thought was "in the air" and more or less common property. In trying to come to a conclusion as to any debatable question as regards Shakespeare, it must never be forgotten that we are dealing not with talent but with genius. The assimilative power of Shakespeare

must have been of a most abnormal character. Therefore the simple education which he received enabled him (being the genius that he was) to achieve results which the most faultless and elaborate education could not accomplish in a man of talent only. Given an ordinary violin, the music to be obtained from it depends upon the player. It is not the paint-box which makes the picture, although it is true that the picture cannot be painted without paints.

Shakespeare as a boy was, we have little doubt, greatly interested in the drama: this predilection he probably inherited from his father, for in 1568, when John Shakespeare was bailiff, or mayor, of Stratford, plays were for the first time in the town performed by a regular company of players under the auspices of the town authorities. In 1575 the Earl of Leicester gave that magnificent reception to Queen Elizabeth, the description of which forms such an interesting episode in Sir Walter Scott's "Kenilworth," and without any great stretch of imagination we may think that the little schoolboy of eleven pushed his way to the front through the throng of spectators, and saw all that was to be seen. He may also well have been taken to Coventry to see the celebrated Mystery Plays.

In or about 1577 Shakespeare's schooldays came to a somewhat abrupt termination. His father's worldly circumstances during the last few years had been rapidly declining, so the boy was taken from school and put to work. He continued to assist his father, and probably

resided with him in Henley Street until 1582, when he added to the difficulties of all parties by marrying Ann Hathaway, the daughter of a yeoman residing at Shottery, a neighbouring village. His wife was eight years his senior, and in May, 1583, the responsibilities of the young couple were further increased by the birth of a daughter, who on the 26th May was baptized and named Susannah. The circumstances connected with the marriage—the apparent unsuitability of their respective ages, together with the early birth of their first child—have given rise to a mass of controversy, the details of which would only encumber these pages, and are of no importance for the present purpose. For more advanced students, and with the object of endeavouring to understand the personal views of Shakespeare as apart from the opinions expressed by the characters in his plays, they are not without interest. In 1585 twins were born (Hamnet and Judith), while the end of the year is probably the time when, feeling that there was “a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune,” Shakespeare left his wife, children, parents, and friends, and bidding good-bye to Stratford, started to seek his fortune in London. There is a tradition to the effect that the immediate cause of his departure was his connexion with a poaching affair on the preserves of Sir Thomas Lucy, of Charlecote, who, there is good reason to believe, unconsciously sat for Shakespeare’s somewhat unflattering portrait of Mr. Justice Shallow. This may have been one of

the causes, but the probability seems that the responsibilities of a wife and young family, combined with the financial embarrassment of his father, all spurred on the young man to take the momentous step.

He either fears his fate too much
Or his deserts are small
That dare not put it to the touch
To win or lose it all.

However this may be, "there's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will," and it is impossible to conjecture what the world would have lost if the poet had not been driven by the pressure of circumstances to leave his native town. On the other hand, his time had been well spent. For so young a man Shakespeare had tasted deeply of the experiences of life. He had known a mother's tenderest care, he had observed how the goodness of a woman never shines so brightly as when contrasted with darkening circumstances; he had also perhaps observed, in the case of his father, how trouble deteriorates a weak character. He had seen the humour and pathos of provincial life, and experienced the "insolence of office." His mind was stored with the lore of the park, the warren, and the chase. The loveliness of country sights and sounds had deeply touched his heart. Above all, when wooing his bride he had experienced how

In the spring a young man's fancy
Lightly turns to thoughts of love,

and could ask,

For where is any author in the world
Teaches such beauty as a woman's eye?

Then he had tasted the delights and anxieties of married life and held his firstborn in his arms. Thus, therefore, when in 1586 we find him installed in London, Shakespeare had completed his provincial training and was fully equipped to play a leading part in the great tragi-comedy of life.

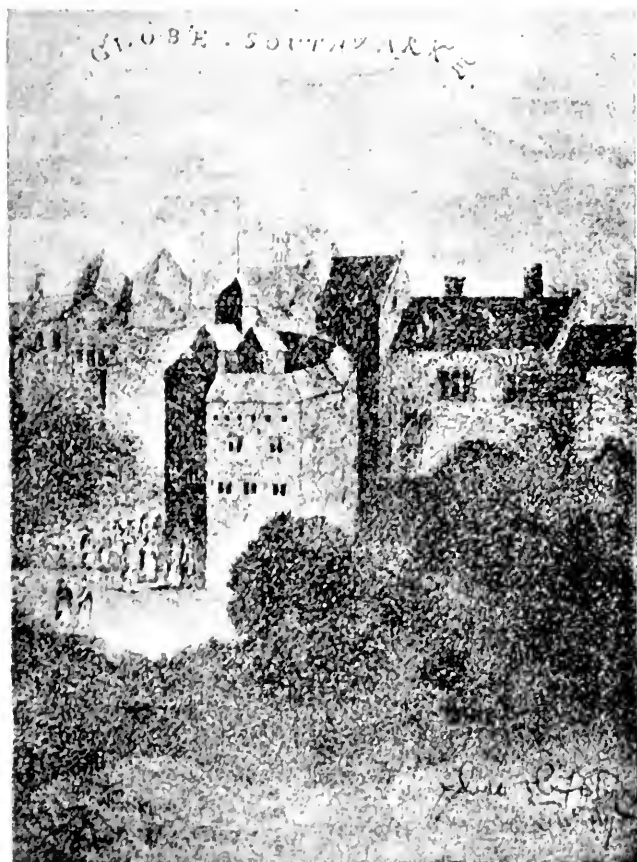
Soon after his arrival in London, Shakespeare seems to have obtained a situation with James Burbage, the proprietor of the first regular play-house erected in England, which was known by the name of "The Theatre," and was situated in Shoreditch. James Burbage was also a livery stableman, and this circumstance may have given rise to the tradition that Shakespeare at one time tended horses outside the theatre, and was so successful in this capacity that he organized a band of lads to assist him, who were known as "Shakespeare's boys." It is probable that he was employed inside the theatre, and it is certain that he mastered all the technical side of his profession, from its lowest to its highest branches. The reader should try to visualize a picture of Elizabethan London. Space will not allow details to be given, but to understand the works of Shakespeare, it is necessary at one time or another to make a study of his environment, in order to appreciate the various allusions to contemporary and topical matters, the slang, and much of the humour found in the plays.

In 1599, in consequence of a dispute with the

ground landlord, James Burbage pulled down "The Theatre," carried the materials across the Thames, and having leased a convenient site on the Bankside, in the Parish of Southwark, erected the celebrated Globe playhouse. It was at this theatre that many of Shakespeare's masterpieces were produced, the principal parts being "created" by Richard Burbage, the most celebrated tragic actor in England and a son of James Burbage, the proprietor. His only rival as an actor was James Alleyn, also a theatrical proprietor and the founder of Alleyn's College at Dulwich. It may be worth while here to give a somewhat detailed account of an Elizabethan playhouse, rather than an imperfect sketch of Elizabethan London in general.

Towards the end of the reign of Elizabeth, and during the beginning of that of James I, the "Bankside" was the most frequented theatrical resort. Persons visiting the theatres on horseback must have crossed London Bridge, and turning to the right, past St. Saviour's Church and the Palace of the Bishop of Winchester, they would ride into the semi-suburban district known as "Bankside." Here they would have found at least four theatres, "The Globe," "The Rose," "The Hope," and "The Swan," the two last mentioned probably occupying the sites of the Bear and Bull rings as shown in the old maps, and they were still occasionally used for these purposes; but the "Globe," which was the largest and best appointed, was used for dramatic representations only. The public theatres were gener-

ally octagon buildings constructed of wood, lath and plaster. A thatched roof ran round the building, but the middle was open to the sky. They were generally three stories high. The stage projected into the middle of the "pit" or "yard" on the ground floor. It was strewn with rushes, while upon it, and on either side of the actors, the young gallants of the day sat upon stools drinking and smoking tobacco. The pit had no seats and was filled with a seething mass of humanity. The tiers above were occupied by various grades of society, sorted—as now—according to the price of admission. Ladies were in the habit of attending the theatre, but when they had any reputation to lose they generally wore masks. Behind the main stage there was an inner stage, and over it a balcony which communicated with the first tier that ran round the building. This inner stage was shut off from the outer stage by curtains which were drawn aside when necessary. It was upon this inner stage that the players in "Hamlet" acted the play within a play, John of Gaunt and King Henry IV were discovered upon their death-beds, and in numerous other ways this inner stage was found most useful. The balcony over it communicated with the "tire" room or dressing-room behind, and also with the main stage by a flight of steps on either side. Upon this balcony Juliet stood to bid good-bye to Romeo, the citizens of Angiers addressed King John, and Richard III appeared between two bishops. The orchestra was also placed in this balcony,



THE GLOBE THEATRE, LONDON, ABOUT 1612.

From an original drawing in the British Museum.

on one side of the stage. The outer stage was protected from the weather by a roof, technically known as "the heavens," which was supported by two turned pillars standing on the main stage. There was no painted scenery, the locality of the supposed scene being indicated by the name of the place written upon a board, and exhibited on the stage. The hangings or curtains were black when a tragedy was to be performed, and blue when a comedy was represented. The stage was hung with arras, behind which Polonius was in hiding when he was killed by Hamlet.

The play began at one o'clock, and was announced by three "soundings" on a trumpet and by flying a flag from the roof of the theatre. The female parts were taken by boys and young men. The acting must have been magnificent, otherwise it would have been impossible to hold the attention of so diverse an audience. It must have been something exceptional which, day after day, would fill the "yard" with the roughest of the rough, and yet prove a continual source of attraction to men of the stamp of Raleigh, Essex, Southampton and Pembroke. What the poetry was like we can happily judge for ourselves. The first impression one gets of the Elizabethan theatre is that of total inadequacy, but a further study very considerably modifies this view, and makes us see that in some respects it was a better school for actors than the modern theatre.

In the days when Shakespeare first reached London, companies of actors were licensed by the Queen and various noblemen, and bore

the names of their respective Patrons. One of these companies was known, during the later years of Elizabeth, as "The Lord Chamberlain's Company," while after the accession of James I it was designated by the title of "The King's Players," and it was to this association that Shakespeare belonged.

The members of the company divided the profits between them, in accordance with their several shares, while for subordinate parts, and to fill the various offices in the theatre, they employed persons called "servitors," paying them a small regular salary, and it was in this modest capacity that Shakespeare is believed to have begun his professional career. It seems likely that this profit sharing may account, in a great measure, for the fact that as all members of the company were directly interested in the result, it was "the play" that was "the thing" and not the actor. And this state of affairs is an almost necessary condition for a healthy national drama. Another consideration not to be overlooked is, that when a poet disposed of a play to a company, he sold it out and out, so that, in the absence of any copyright law, the play being the absolute property of the purchasers, they were at liberty to do just what they liked with it. They could alter it—or let their own stock author work over it, and supply deficiencies with his technical knowledge of the stage.

This is what Shakespeare did in many cases—notably at the beginning of his career.

Again, it was considered far better that the

play should not be published, for fear of its performance by unauthorized persons, but if a drama became very popular, spurious versions were apt to be issued by booksellers, based upon prompt copies surreptitiously obtained from the actors, and shorthand notes taken during performance. Then sometimes, in self defence, the author would allow his work to be published, printed in accordance with his wishes from the true original copy. These small editions of single plays are known as "quartos," and the above may, to a certain extent, explain why sixteen of Shakespeare's plays were for the first time published, after his death, in the Folio Edition of 1623. It also affords a plausible answer to the difficult question as to why none of the Manuscripts of Shakespeare's numerous works have been preserved. Before his death, and while the plays were the property of the Company, and they could make anything out of their acting or publishing rights, they would naturally guard them jealously, but after the Folio was published they may well have regarded them as comparatively worthless.

It was under the conditions thus imperfectly sketched, that the genius of Shakespeare grew to maturity, and the rest of his life shows how he became an actor, then a reviser of old stock pieces, then the principal dramatist and a sharer in the profits of "The Globe" and "Blackfriars" Theatres, and finally a country gentleman with a coat-of-arms and a considerable fortune.

It is proposed, in this brief sketch of the

poet's life, simply to mention the plays and poems as so many historical facts, leaving any particulars as to the sources of the plots, the character and beauties of the several works, and other matters of interest to be dealt with in a subsequent section: but after any play is first mentioned, a reference will be given to the page where more detailed information respecting it can be found. This will enable the student to note how the actual facts in the life of Shakespeare sometimes give form and colour to his imaginative work; but this connexion should not be unduly relied upon: it affords many a suggestive hint, but not the materials for a detailed biography (involving all kinds of personal gossip), as some commentators have supposed.

To begin with, the chronology of Shakespearian writings is not yet beyond doubt. In the first Folio, the dramas are divided into Comedies, Histories, Tragedies, while the volume opens with "The Tempest," which, we have good ground for believing, was the last complete play written. The means whereby an approximate (but always conjectural) chronology has been arrived at are so many and complicated, that only the more self-evident can be indicated. A general idea can be obtained from a careful perusal of the works themselves: the growth of the poet's mind and art being so self-evident that all judicious readers would agree upon certain first principles. Thus "Lear" could not have been written before "Romeo and Juliet." The earlier Comedies are light and irresponsible compared

with the later ones, and we can watch the poet gradually losing the freshness of youth in order to obtain the pathos, power, and passion of maturer years. Then certain allusions to contemporary historical and social events fix or indicate the date of production or publication, while some writers on the subject place great reliance upon metrical tests. In the earlier plays rhymes are far more frequent than in the later ones; verbal quibbles abound, even in tragedy, but are gradually eliminated. The blank verse alters in character as the poet progresses towards perfection: it becomes more pliable and irregular and ultimately prose is largely introduced, as in the latest version of "Hamlet."

"Love's Labour's Lost" (p. 38), "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" (p. 39), "The Comedy of Errors" (p. 40) and "Romeo and Juliet" (p. 42) were produced between 1590-1594, and form the first-fruits of the harvest. It will be remembered that the last date given was 1586, when Shakespeare came to London, and during the interval we may imagine him working at the practical part of his profession and learning the technique which enabled him to express the thoughts and images that crowded in upon his brain. The difference between the town and country made a deep impression, for even "Love's Labour's Lost" is evidently written by a man who, though he loves the country yet thoroughly knows the town. The three parts of "Henry VI" (p. 44), "Richard III" (p. 46), "Richard II" (p. 47) with "Titus Andronicus" (p. 48), are plays

which belong to this period, and considered together they will serve to recall several important points. The three parts of "Henry VI" are interesting as showing how Shakespeare worked over plays originally written by others, and it is in connexion with his share in them that the elder dramatist Greene, when dying in 1592, made his celebrated attack upon Shakespeare, calling him "an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers," and adding that he "being an absolute Johannes factotum is, in his own conceite, the only Shake-scene in a country." This outburst of spleen was afterwards handsomely apologized for by Chettle, Green's publisher, but having regard to the conditions under which plays then belonged to theatrical companies, it is easy to understand and almost excuse Green's annoyance, without attributing anything dishonourable to Shakespeare. Another advantage to be gained from a consideration of these plays in a group is that we learn from them how much Shakespeare was indebted to his great predecessor, Marlowe, and how he gradually emancipated himself from his direct influence. This will bring us down to 1594, when "The Merchant of Venice" (p. 49) was first produced.

It is now necessary to say a few words as to Shakespeare's achievements as a poet apart from his plays, and his indebtedness to his patron, Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton. This is an important fact in his life, especially as regarded his material prosperity, while it cannot be altogether disregarded when considering those

more important but recondite occurrences which in middle life seem to have rendered him unhappy and pessimistic just when his worldly circumstances were most flourishing. In 1593 "Venus and Adonis" was published by Richard Field, and the poet in dedicating it to the Earl of Southampton describes it as the "first heir of my invention." This expression has given rise to the conjecture that the poem was written, at least in part, before Shakespeare left Stratford, and that it was revised and then published when his position as a dramatist had called the attention of the public to his claims as a poet. It met with such gratifying success that in 1594 it was followed by "Lucrece," dedicated to the same patron.

Most of the Sonnets are supposed to have been written about this time, but additions were made subsequently, and, as was not unusual, they remained in manuscript for some years, being passed round from hand to hand for perusal. Therefore they did not appear in print until 1609, when they were published by one Thomas Thorpe, apparently without the sanction of the author.

Into the vexed question as to how far the Sonnets may be considered as autobiographical it is impossible and undesirable to enter. On perusal a series of them seem to imply that Shakespeare had been deprived of his mistress by his patron—that his friendship was so dear to him that he forgave his friend and surrendered his mistress, and here, say the more imaginative biographers, we have disclosed in detail the

causes of that pessimistic frame of mind which resulted in "Timon of Athens," "Troilus and Cressida," "Antony and Cleopatra" and "King Lear," and as the Earl of Southampton was Shakespeare's patron it follows that he was the false friend. It is not necessary entirely to disregard the personal note, but to press it too far is unsound. "David Copperfield" cannot take the place of Forster's "Life of Dickens," and yet it reveals to us more of the inner life of its author than his authoritative biography. That Shakespeare had troubles and felt them deeply is nothing more than the common lot of mankind, but the exceptional use that he made of his experiences is quite another matter. He was a supreme artist. He gives us with unerring instinct the utterances of men under all circumstances, and to him who could understand and appreciate Lear and Falstaff, Hamlet and Juliet, Macbeth and Rosalind, it surely would be an easy matter to voice in the first person and in a recognized poetic form the story of a passionate intrigue. Mr. Sidney Lee has summed up in a masterly manner the facts which we must consider, before coming to a verdict on this intricate question. About the worldly advantages which accrued to the rising poet and actor from his intimate connection with the most splendid and popular young nobleman of his day there is no question. He and his company obtained an introduction to the Queen and the Court, and the royal favour was continued in even greater measure by her successor. Shakespeare's plays were in great request at



[British Museum.]

SHAKESPEARE'S SIGNATURE ON A MORTGAGE, 1612.

Court, and no doubt this popularity in high places would set the fashion and appreciably add to the receipts at the Globe and Blackfriars theatres.

We now come to the year 1595. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (p. 51) was produced and played, probably as part of the marriage festivities of some great noble—the Duke of Bedford and the Earl of Derby have been suggested. The compliment to Queen Elizabeth, contained in the play, indicates that the poet was desirous of cultivating the patronage of the Court so happily begun under the auspices of his patron. His monetary resources were apparently good, for in 1596 he visited Stratford and rendered much needed assistance to his father. He was not only extricated from his financial worries but was enabled (no doubt at the instigation and expense of his son) to make application to the College of Heralds for a coat of arms, which after considerable delay was duly granted to him in 1599.

In August, 1596, Shakespeare's only son Hamnet, then eleven and a half years old, died and was buried at Stratford. It is probable that this sad event was one of the immediate causes of Shakespeare's visit to his native town; but the sorrow was perhaps the means of reuniting him to his family, for from that date to the end of his life his connection with Stratford was never broken off. He was obliged to live in London, but he visited his home once a year. The death of his son and heir was a terrible blow, and many writers conceive that we hear the echoes of his grief in the lamentations of Constance over her

son Arthur, in the play of "King John" (p. 52). "All's Well that Ends Well" (p. 54), and "The Taming of the Shrew" (p. 56) are credited to the year 1595. The Induction to the latter comedy is well worth careful study in reference to the poet's biography. The local names and allusions are numerous and suggest a recent visit to Warwickshire.

In 1597 Shakespeare returned to history for his inspiration, and the First and Second Parts of "Henry IV" (p. 56) were the result. They were an immediate success, not only for their intrinsic power and beauty but chiefly because they formed the setting for the immortal character of Falstaff. Elizabeth had the good taste to at once recognize the magnificence of this achievement, but her taste was more questionable when (according to Rowe) she commanded the author to continue the character "for one play more and to show him in love." This almost impossible command was carried out with characteristic wit and tact in "The Merry Wives of Windsor" (p. 56), which comedy, tradition asserts, was written and produced in ten days. The task of writing his next play must have been much more congenial to the poet, for he had a special admiration for the hero, King Henry V (p. 56), and the play of that name worthily concludes the Henry IV cycle. "Henry V" is left at the summit of his power and fame, and the series of historical dramas from Richard II to Richard III is completed.

In 1597 Shakespeare's financial affairs were evidently flourishing, for he bought a large house

in Stratford known as New Place, where he was residing at the time of his death.

"Henry V" was apparently finished in 1599, and the following years were remarkable for the production of the three most celebrated comedies, namely, "Much Ado about Nothing" (p. 60), "As you Like it" (p. 62), and "Twelfth Night" (p. 64). The latter play was first presented in the Hall of the Middle Temple. In 1601 the poet broke new ground by going to Roman history in search of the groundwork of his plots, and "Julius Cæsar" (p. 65) was the earliest result. "Hamlet" (p. 107) was produced at the Globe in 1602, followed by "Troilus and Cressida" (p. 68). In March, 1603, Queen Elizabeth died, and in May following the company to which Shakespeare belonged received royal letters patent from her successor, James I, and became emphatically the "King's Players." It does not seem, however, that the foregoing years were nothing but a record of success and happiness. Various personal, business and political worries marked their course, and these difficulties exerted a considerable influence upon the character of the poet. His gaiety left him to a great extent, only returning near the close of his professional career in the delightful comedy contained in "A Winter's Tale" and "The Tempest." Any loss in this direction was more than compensated by the added depth and insight into life and its problems which resulted from these untoward circumstances, and although, after the death of the Queen, Shakespeare appears to have been continually successful and free from care

with regard to worldly matters, the experiences of these later years had entered deeply into his soul, and rendered him capable of pessimistic utterances which at first sight seem utterly at variance with the genial spirit of the earlier works. A careful reading of the plays just alluded to will reveal the gradual growth of this state of mind. Jaques in "As you Like It" adds a bitter-sweet flavour to the woodland romance. Malvolio, who is the butt of the roysterers in "Twelfth Night," is in essentials better than his tormentors. "Julius Cæsar" shows how the best men may work the greatest mischief, and exhibits the darker side of politics. "Hamlet" demonstrates how, when the mind is "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," we "lose the name of action," while "Troilus and Cressida" is, as it were, the obverse of "Romeo and Juliet," exhibiting sexual love at its worst. Cressida, without committing any of the exceptional crimes attributed to many of the heroines of Renaissance tragedy, is yet branded for all time as the typical wanton:

Let it not be believ'd for womanhood!
Think, we had mothers:

What were the outward and visible causes of this inward and spiritual change? As regards business worries, we find that the fortunes of the adult players were rendered more precarious by the immense success of companies of boyplayers, who so caught the fancy of the fickle public that they seriously interfered with the finances of

the regular actors. The success of "Hamlet" more than redeemed this grievance, and the play contains many interesting and amusing references to the dispute. The Puritans also were beginning to make themselves felt as a power in the land, while their hatred of the players led to mutual recrimination and intolerance. Annoyances such as these are inseparable from any professional career, so that it is generally thought that we must seek for the explanation of this change of the poet's outlook on life partly to the fact of his relationship with Southampton, already alluded to, and partly to the connection of the poet's patron with the rebellion of Essex against the Queen, which took place in 1601, and in which Shakespeare and the company to which he belonged appear to have been remotely implicated. The conspirators subsidised the company of the Globe Theatre to play the tragedy of "Richard II," and these performances were looked upon by the authorities as seditious. Shakespeare's friendship with Southampton, therefore, led him and his companions into a dangerous position with the Queen and Court, and no doubt the death of Essex upon the scaffold must have been a heavy blow to him. He did not, however, entirely forfeit the patronage of the queen, as his company acted before her in February, 1603, only three months previous to her death. In the latter end of 1603 the theatres in London were closed in consequence of the plague, and Shakespeare and his fellow actors made a provincial tour.

There is much interesting information extant with reference to this subject, from which we gather that these tours afterwards led to the establishment of those stock companies who performed in various well-marked circuits until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Firmly established in the favour of the new king, the career of Shakespeare from 1603 to 1611 is a chronicle of masterpieces. Such an output in so short a time is unparalleled. To name the plays proves this. In 1604 we have "Measure for Measure" (p. 71) and "Othello" (p. 69), in 1605 "Macbeth" (p. 73), in 1606 "King Lear" (p. 76), while "Timon of Athens" (p. 82), and "Pericles" (82), are attributed to 1607. Neither of these latter plays was written entirely by Shakespeare. Towards the end of his literary life, when he had gained for himself the position of the leading dramatist of the day, he reverted to the custom of the theatre and allowed himself to collaborate with other authors. The process was, so to say, a reversal of the earlier system. Then, being a young and untried author, he was set to work to rewrite plays which had already met with some approbation from the public, and the problem then is to extract the Shakespearian portion from the earlier play. In his later collaboration he seems to have selected the subject and written such parts of it as appealed to him, leaving his fellow dramatists to finish the work and fit it for the theatre, and this no doubt accounts for their loose and unsatisfactory construction. The name of Shakespeare

then spelled success, and the poet with that disregard of his transcendental powers, which is one of our greatest puzzles, left some of his most valuable jewels to be set by comparatively incompetent journeymen. Thus the problem of the plays not wholly written by Shakespeare is reversed. Roughly speaking, in the earlier series it is,—given a non-Shakespearian play to find out the poet's work; in the latter it is—given a Shakespearian play to eliminate the non-Shakespearian part. The latter problem is not so difficult as the former. Shakespeare's genius at its maturity is so self-evident that to extract from "Timon of Athens" and "Pericles," the genuine parts, is more easy than to find the less mature Shakespearian work in the three parts of "Henry VI." "Henry VIII" (p. 82) is another example of a play written in collaboration under the later conditions, the fellow dramatist in this case being the genuine poet Fletcher. Between 1608 and 1611 Shakespeare produced from his unaided pen five plays, probably in the following order, "Antony and Cleopatra" (p. 78), "Coriolanus" (p. 80), "Cymbeline" (p. 83), "A Winter's Tale" (p. 83), and "The Tempest" (p. 83), and in 1611 he is believed to have given up his active connection with the Globe and Blackfriars Theatres and returned to his home at Stratford, looking forward no doubt to many years of quiet happiness and dignity as a country gentleman. Thus his active life in London was exchanged for a quiet uneventful life in the country, and one of the pleasantest facts in his

life is derived from a perusal of the later plays, especially "Cymbeline," "A Winter's Tale," and "The Tempest." Whatever storms he had encountered upon the sea of life, they ceased before he reached his final haven, and the end of his voyage was brightened by a calm and radiant sunset.

His pessimism departed; he recovered all his old fun and humour; he knew all the tragedy of life, but his faith in men and women had returned, so that, strengthened by the perils he had passed, he reached in the creation of the characters of Imogen, Perdita, and Miranda, heights which even he had not previously touched. Thus his artistic career corresponded with his life and ended in peace. His wife was alive at the time of his retirement to Stratford, and she survived him seven years. In 1607 his daughter, Susannah, married John Hall, a physician in practice in the town. There is evidence that he interested himself in local matters, and from time to time visited London on business or pleasure, keeping up his connection with his old friends and fellow workers who, in their turn, visited him at New Place. In January, 1616, he drafted his will. In February his youngest daughter, Judith, was married to Thomas Quiney. Shortly afterwards his two friends, Michael Drayton and Ben Jonson, visited him. After their departure, being unwell, he completed his will, and he died on the 23rd April, 1616, being then only fifty-two years of age. There is a story to the effect that the visit of

Drayton and Jonson was the immediate cause of his fatal illness. It is related by Rowe how the old friends had "a merry meeting," but "drank too hard, for Shakespeare died of a feavour there contracted." It is not necessary to give much credence to this legend. The sanitary conditions are quite sufficient to account for the "feavour," while the provincial ideas as to the lives of play-actors, combined with the growing Puritan feeling, may easily have given rise to the other part of the legend. Be this as it may, nothing can detract from our love and gratitude to Shakespeare who (as owner of the tithes) was buried with all honour in the chancel of Stratford church.

Much comment has also been made upon the terms of his will, but when we consider the purchasing power of money, the age of his wife, and the recent establishment in life of his daughters, it is all capable of a reasonable and favourable interpretation, so that further reference here is unnecessary.

When speaking of the death of Shakespeare ordinary words utterly fail. He wrote his own best epitaph when he sang in "Cymbeline":

Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone and ta'en thy wages;
Quiet consummation have:
And renowned be thy grave!

THE PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE

LOVE'S Labour's Lost.—This is by general consent considered as the first play written by Shakespeare, and it is also presumed that he invented the slight plot, as it has never been satisfactorily traced to any existent source. It was played before Queen Elizabeth in 1597, and for this representation was considerably enlarged and revised, traces of these additions and improvements being especially noticeable in Acts IV and V. Act V is much longer than the others, and contains many verses which exhibit more mature and dramatic power than the rhyming couplets of the earlier portion. The play was published in quarto in 1598. One of the chief objects of the drama seems to have been to satirize affectations and mannerisms of speech then current, and known as Euphuism, but there are so many "pleasant conceits" in the comedy that it runs perilously near to falling into the very faults it was intended to ridicule. Some scholars consider this the least considerable of all Shakespeare's works, and perhaps this may be

so if we were compelled to make a choice; but it has a special interest as showing the beginnings of what was afterwards Shakespeare's incomparable art, and for their own sake we could ill afford to miss the merry and memorable characters who, without being so strongly marked as later creations, yet play their parts with infinite grace and merriment, and serve as studies for more masterly presentments of similar characters. Thus Armado may be considered as a study for Parolles. Costard is the father of several more amusing and philosophical sons, while Biron and Rosalind are the prototypes of the immortal Benedict and Beatrice. The interlude presented before the Prince and Princess is evidently the rough draft of "the most lamentable comedy of Pyramus and Thisby."

Two Gentlemen of Verona.—The story of this play is taken from a Spanish romance called "Diana," written by George de Montemayor and translated by one Bartholomew Young. It was first printed in the folio of 1623. It is one of the slightest of Shakespeare's plays, and does not appear to have been frequently acted, but it was recently successfully revived by the late Mr. Augustin Daly, Miss Ada Rehan appearing as Julia. Like "Love's Labour's Lost," it contains several studies for characters and scenes which were afterwards worked up and improved. Thus, the scene between Julia and Lucetta is a sketch for the infinitely superior one between Portia and Nerissa, while that between Silvia and Julia serves as a faint indication of the magnificent

dialogue between Viola and Olivia. We also find the incident of the heroine disguised as a boy following her lover, which was so frequently afterwards used in the later plays, *e.g.*, "All's Well that Ends Well," "Merchant of Venice," "Twelfth Night," and "Cymbeline." Another point of interest is that the scene is for the first time laid in Italy, which country, with its sunny skies, gorgeous dresses, historic towns, noble art and literature, combined with the exuberant life of its Renaissance, exercised an immense attraction upon the poet. The humorous scenes are perhaps somewhat tedious to readers unacquainted with the byways of Elizabethan life and thought, but Launce and his dog exhibit one of the distinctive qualities of Shakespeare's humour when dealing with clowns or uneducated persons. We laugh *with* them as well as *at* them. We sympathize and love them even when their follies, vices, and pompous pretensions are being dissected with merciless truth and irony, and thus it is that Launce, Bottom, Launcelot Gobbo, and a crowd of other silly and disreputable persons become our friends. We see their place in the great scheme of evolution, so dare not despise them. This play also attests the progress that Shakespeare was making in pure poetry.

The Comedy of Errors.—This comedy was never printed until it appeared in the first folio. The materials for the plot were, it is thought, found in a contemporary translation of the "Menaechmi" of Plautus. It is a farcical comedy written for the most part in beautiful poetry.

The serious incidents of the first and last scenes, the character of Adriana, the neglected, shrewish wife, together with the grace of the writing and the dexterity with which the complicated plot is manipulated, make the play a model which it is to be regretted has not been more frequently copied. It serves to show how the genius of Shakespeare could adorn any kind of dramatic composition, and the admirable facility with which he could, even at this early stage in his career, make use of his material. It has been suggested that the many allusions to married life contained in the text were a reflection of Shakespeare's own matrimonial experiences. If this is so, both sides of the question are fairly stated, and the only point which seems somewhat quaint to us is the way in which man is supposed to be superior to woman. This point of view receives further emphasis in the magnificent speech of Katherine in "The Taming of the Shrew" (Act V, Sc. ii), but it was hardly to be expected that Shakespeare, with his Elizabethan surroundings, should rise superior to it. As a fact, however, although he falls into line with current ideas in one way, in another he rises entirely above them, for, as Ruskin has eloquently pointed out, "The catastrophe of every play is caused always by the folly or fault of the man: the redemption, if there be any, is by the wisdom and virtue of a woman, and, failing that, there is none."¹ The play has frequently been acted, and when two sets of comedians can be found sufficiently alike to

¹ "Sesame and Lilies," p. 79.

render probable the resemblance of the twins, and yet of sufficient ability to do justice to the parts, it still has all the elements of a successful stage play.

Romeo and Juliet.—This is Shakespeare's first tragedy and first masterpiece. It bears no comparison with the three previous plays, for, although it contains many errors of taste, quibbles and blemishes, yet it doubtless deserves the eulogy of Mr. Sidney Lee, which is at once the shortest and most complete that I know of. He says, "'Romeo and Juliet' as a tragic poem on the theme of love has no rival in any literature." The tragedy was originally written and probably acted in or about 1591, this date having been fixed from an allusion to an earthquake in the text. It was first published in quarto in 1597, in an unauthorized version: again in 1599 and 1609, while two more quartos afterwards appeared and the play was, of course, included in the folio of 1623. The five quartos attest the immense success of the tragedy, for these various editions would never have proved remunerative had not the play been a remarkable stage favourite.

So much has been written as to the source from which Shakespeare drew the materials for his plot, that nothing can be said upon the point beyond the fact that "The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet, written first in Italian by Bandell and now in Englishe by Ar: Br: (Arthur Brooke) 1562," contains the substantial groundwork of the story. Shakespeare's genius appears

in the way in which he has treated this romantic love tale, and the creation of the characters of Mercutio and the Nurse. The former is an exquisite high comedy personage, while the latter is the perfection of low comedy. Neither of them is lovable in the ordinary sense of the word. Mercutio is a cynical man about town, while the Nurse, if considered seriously, and especially in Act III, Scene v, must almost be called despicable; and yet, as mentioned above, Shakespeare's humour and humanity transfigures them into the most delightful companions, while, at the same time, truthfully telling us all their bad qualities. Another point worthy of consideration is the way in which these comedy characters are worked into the very material of the tragedy, adding to its impressiveness while giving it its lifelike variety. The beneficent priest, Father Laurence, also exhibits the wide sympathy of the poet, when we remember the sentiments held by so many of our forefathers towards the Roman Church at the date when the play was written. Two memorable lines put into his mouth form, I believe, one of the master keys with which to unlock the Shakespearean philosophy:

For nought so vile that on the Earth doth live
But to the Earth some special good doth give.

Act II, Scene iii.

But it is the love poetry which has immortalized "Romeo and Juliet." In all these early plays Shakespeare has taught us about love. In "Love's Labour's Lost" everybody *talks* about love, but there is not much real passion. In "Two Gentle-

men of Verona" the women are pure and faithful, but the men are inconstant. In the "Comedy of Errors" we are reminded that the troubles of love often begin, instead of being ended, by marriage, but in "Romeo and Juliet" youthful passion sweeps everything before it, and Love is lord of life and death. It is impudence to discuss the love poetry of "Romeo and Juliet"; the very names stand for the thing itself, and Shakespeare has uttered once and for all the language which worthily expresses and appreciates the sexual side of love. The play has always been most successful on the stage. Elliston, Edmund Kean, Charles Kemble, Macready, Irving, Forbes Robertson, have all played Romeo; Mrs. Siddons, Mrs. Jordan, Miss O'Neil, Miss A. Neilson, Miss Mary Anderson, Miss Ellen Terry, and Mrs. Patrick Campbell have all been celebrated as Juliet, but it has often been remarked that before an actor or actress is old enough to have gained experience to do justice to the parts of the lovers, they are unfortunately too old to look them.

King Henry VI, Parts I, II, III.—It will be convenient to group these three plays together. That immediately after Shakespeare's death they were considered to belong to his theatre is shown by their inclusion in the First Folio, where they were published in the form we now have them; that they were not originally written by him is equally certain. His hand may be distinguished in them all, and his contributions were regarded as of such importance that they were ultimately published as his work. A slight acquaintance

with Elizabethan literature will furnish many instances of such collaboration. Marston, Decker, Middleton, Beaumont, Fletcher, and even Jonson (who disliked the practice), all worked together on these composite plays, which at last had to be published with the works of one or other of their reputed authors. Mr. Sidney Lee says, "Criticism has proved beyond doubt that in these plays Shakespeare did no more than add, revise and correct other men's work." Peele, Greene and Marlow are all suggested as authors, or part authors, of the earlier plays, and it will suffice for the present purpose to bear in mind that Marlow's share in them is indisputable. It is impossible to say with certainty what Shakespeare contributed, but the scenes where Talbot is introduced in the First Part, Jack Cade's insurrection in the Second Part, and the character of the Duke of Gloucester in the Third Part have been frequently cited as showing his unmistakable work, and besides (especially in Parts II and III) the evidence seems to point to a careful revision by him. The part of the Duke of Gloucester is a preliminary study for Richard III, and is nearly allied to the genius of Marlow, both in its poetic and moral aspect. Although these chronicle plays cannot compare with the later historical dramas upon which Shakespeare worked single handed, yet a careful study of them will not only well repay the student but will go a long way towards justifying their inclusion in Shakespeare's works. They show the wonderful vitality of the pre-Shakespearian stage, and help to explain how

his mighty genius was after all a normal development of the great literary renaissance of the age of Elizabeth. The material both for the earlier and later versions will be found in Holinshed's paraphrase of Hall's "Chronicle." When the plays were first produced they seem, from contemporary references (*e.g.* Prologue to "Every Man in his Humour," "Henslow's Diary," etc.), to have been very successful, but afterwards their theatrical record is meagre.

Richard III.—Speaking of this play, Mr. A. C. Swinburne says, "This only of Shakespeare's plays belongs absolutely to the school of Marlowe. The influence of the elder master, and that influence alone, is perceptible from end to end. . . . It is doubtless a better piece of work than Marlowe ever did: I dare not say than Marlowe ever could have done." It is the second of Shakespeare's plays which has, so to say, conquered the world. Like "Romeo and Juliet," its career has been a series of triumphs both in the study and on the stage. Six quarto editions were published before it was included in the First Folio. The source of the play was the "Chronicles of Holinshed," founded on those of Hall, who, in his turn, was indebted to Sir Thomas More, who wrote a life of Richard III. Contemporary references to the performance of the part of Richard III by Burbage show that the humorous villain at once became a stage favourite, and many imitations and parodies of the line "A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse," are extant. Barry, Garrick, Kemble, Edmund

Kean, Phelps, Charles Kean, Barry Sullivan, Irving, and indeed all tragic actors, have appeared with more or less success in this actor's masterpiece. It was one of Garrick's most celebrated parts, and Edmund Kean, at his best, must have been perfectly wonderful. Hazlitt says of this impersonation, "The concluding scene in which he is killed by Richmond is the most brilliant of the whole. He fights at last like one drunk with wounds: and the attitude in which he stands with his hands stretched out, after his sword has been wrested from him, has a preternatural and terrific grandeur, as if his will could not be disarmed, and the very phantom of his despair had power to kill." Sir Henry Irving also found the part most congenial, while his successful production of the play during the palmy days of the Lyceum in 1877, had the additional merit of banishing from the stage the mutilated version of Colley Cibber in which Garrick and Edmund Kean had the misfortune to appear.

Richard II.—Marlowe, when nearing the end of his short and tragic career, wrote the noble play of "Edward II" showing how a weak, pleasure-loving, and vacillating king was lured on to deposition and death by the bad advice of vicious favourites. This is the motive of "Richard II," and Shakespeare's play seems to have been written in friendly rivalry with that of his great predecessor and contemporary. The story is again taken from the "Chronicles of Holinshed." Four editions in quarto appeared before

the Folio, and it therefore seems fair to conjecture that the stage popularity of the play was greater when it was first written than it has been since. Charles Kean included it in his celebrated revivals at the Princess's in 1857, and in 1903 Mr. Beer-bohm Tree's magnificent production at His Majesty's demonstrated that when worthily acted and mounted, there is no reason to relegate the play to the study only. It is possible that current political allusions account to a certain extent for its popularity in Shakespeare's time (see p. 33). while the chance it gives for spectacular display must be taken into account when it has achieved a run in modern times. Many different opinions are held as to the merits of the tragedy. Coleridge—one of the first of aesthetic critics—places it very high: "I know of no character drawn by our great poet with such unequalled skill as Richard II." This praise would be considered excessive by many other critics, but every one is agreed as to the lyric beauty of the poetry and the magnificent note of patriotism which rings throughout like a trumpet call. John of Gaunt's dying speech (Act II, Sc. i) would alone place the play among the priceless possessions of any nation where patriotism is still regarded as a virtue.

Titus Andronicus.—Happily the consensus of critical opinion is against the inclusion of this terrible and bloodthirsty play in the catalogue of Shakespeare's undoubted work. That it was attributed to him is shown by its place in the First Folio. There is a tradition, dating from 1687, to

the effect "that it was not originally his, but brought by a private author to be acted, and he only gave some master touches to one or two of the principal parts or characters." The play is worthy of study by serious students as an example of the pre-Shakespearian "tragedy of blood" from which "Hamlet" is a lineal descendant. It is interesting also in connection with Marlowe's influence on Shakespeare, and indicates how the greater poet was able to assimilate what was good in any art form.

Merchant of Venice.—Here Shakespeare completely emancipates himself from the influence of Marlowe, even where the verbal resemblances are most striking. While the "Jew of Malta" degenerates into a mere "tragedy of blood," the "Merchant of Venice" rises step by step until even our interest in the character of Shylock is transcended and the end is heavenly harmony. A comparison of Barabas and Shylock is most instructive. They are both evidently drawn from the same model. They speak the same language, they are interested in the same matters, they both possess great wealth, they are well versed in the Jewish scriptures, their treatment by their contemporaries, their family affections, their love for their only daughters are equally insisted upon in both plays, but the result is absolutely different. Barabas becomes a melodramatic monster, Shylock stands for all time as the type of the mediaeval Jew. But Shylock is not alone interesting in this fascinating play. Out of many effective characters, the heroine, Portia, takes a

high rank amongst Shakespeare's noble heroines. Her wit, beauty, and courage, combined with the sweetest of womanly natures, make her the prototype of the noble renaissance lady as easily as Shylock stands for the mediaeval Jew, so that when the two stand confronted in the memorable trial scene, the art of Shakespeare is seen to be "not for an age, but for all time."

The last act is a very remarkable instance of the poet's knowledge of the stage. The opening dialogue between Lorenzo and Jessica is one of the most exquisite poems in the world. Shakespeare probably founded the play upon "The Adventures of Gianetto" in the collection of stories entitled "Il Pecorone," by Giovanni Fiorentino, Milan, 1558, but this statement is only a bare indication of the sources of the plot about which much interesting matter has been written by Mr. Sydney Lee and Miss Toulmin Smith. Two quarto editions were published before the play was included in the Folio, and from the time of its original production it has always been a stage favourite, as, in addition to the dramatic and poetic interest, it contains a great number of splendid acting parts besides those of Portia and Shylock, which are unsurpassable.

Burbage played Shylock. The character was at first treated as a low comedy type, but Macklin in 1741 rescued the part from the low comedian and invested it with its proper dignity. It was one of Edmund Kean's most successful impersonations, and he was the first actor who disregarded the traditional red wig. The most

memorable Shylock of our day is that of Sir Henry Irving, who, without sacrificing the more savage side of the character, indicates the profound pathos of the Jew's situation. Mrs. Clive and Mrs. Siddons both won great success as Portia, while Miss Terry's embodiment of the part ranks as one of her greatest triumphs.

A Midsummer Night's Dream.—The circumstances under which this play was written have been alluded to (see p. 29). The plot has not been traced to any specific source, though research has indicated various works from which hints may have been derived. The play is, however, essentially original. The framework is most delicate, but so strong that we cannot escape from the charm when once the great magician has cast his spell, and the brilliant and incongruous elements unfold and combine like a wondrous kaleidoscope. At first we see the pomp and glory of ancient Greece. The marble palace of Theseus hung with Tyrian purple. The eye is dazzled by the sight of the kingly hero, with his barbaric queen, surrounded by nobles, priests, soldiers, youths and maidens, while the ear is charmed with the roll of the sonorous verse; then suddenly the glittering pageant fades, and we find ourselves laughing in the midst of a most exquisite company of English Elizabethan comedians. "Sweet Bully Bottom" may tell us that he "hath the best wit of any handicraft man in Athens," but we know that he was born and bred within a few miles of Stratford-on-Avon. Then again the scene is changed: the moonlight floods

the woodland glades while the elves and fairies of English folklore dance before our eyes, and best of all, the "beef-fed mechanicals" rub shoulders with the fairies, and their queen is "enamoured of an ass." Out of these incongruous materials the genius of Shakespeare has woven a most exquisite fabric of fun, fancy, and poetry. In writing the "tedious brief scene of young Pyramus and his love Thisbe," it has been pointed out by Stanton and others that the poet was probably drawing from his recollection of the plays produced by the trading companies at Coventry, which were performed down to his time, and which in all probability he had seen.

The play when produced was an immense success. Two quarto editions were published, while contemporary allusions by John Taylor, the Water Poet, and others, also attest the popularity of "the most lamentable comedy of Pyramus and Thisbe." Bottom the weaver is, in his way, as distinct a masterpiece of creation as Shylock. Notwithstanding the many stage difficulties involved, the play has become a theatrical favourite, and has been produced by Mr. Benson and Mr. Tree with much success. The late Mr. Phelps found in the part of Bottom one of his best comic characters.

King John.—This tragedy was first printed after Shakespeare's death in the Folio of 1623. It is founded upon an older play known as "The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England." The older play was in two parts, but the incidents contained in both of them were com-

bined by Shakespeare. There is no direct evidence of the date of production, but tradition has associated it with the death of the poet's son Hamnet (see p. 29). It does not appear to have been played during Stuart times, but afterwards we read of many memorable performances. Colley Cibber produced, in 1745, a play called "Papal Tyranny," which was a mangled version of Shakespeare's tragedy, and therefore, Garrick, in order perhaps to show the undoubted superiority of the original, revived it at Drury Lane, himself taking the king, but this performance did not rank amongst his most famous impersonations. Mrs. Siddons made an immense success as Constance, the parts of the King and Faulconbridge being taken by her brothers, John and Philip Kemble. Edmund Kean, Phelps, and Charles Kean, also revived the play, and it has been seen in recent times under the management of Mr. Tree. The reason for these frequent revivals, especially by "stock" companies, is easily explained. The part of King John can only be adequately played by a tragedian of the first rank, but it is unsympathetic, and does not appeal to a "star actor." Constance, Faulconbridge, Hubert, and Arthur, are all rôles in which actors have magnificent opportunities for the display of their art. In the episode of Hubert and Arthur we have a scene pre-eminently distinguished for its pathos.

Faulconbridge the bluff, brave, faithful soldier, makes a large claim upon our sympathies, and enlivens the scenes in which he appears with his rough humour, while the lamentations of Con-

stance reveal a power and pathos not previously equalled in historical drama. A comparison of King John with earlier historical plays will show at once the progress the poet was making.

This is not a mere chronicle, but a living, poignant tragedy, founded upon the facts of history. Although, perhaps, not so fascinating to the reader as some of the poet's other works, repeated perusals will add to our admiration and manifest new subtleties of characterization.

All's Well that Ends Well.—This play must be classed amongst the comedies, but the subject is essentially of a serious description. The place it holds in our affections will depend upon the view taken of the character of Helena. Much difference of opinion has been expressed with regard to her position in the list of the heroines of Shakespeare. The whole drama is another thoughtful and powerful essay on the art of love. The lovelorn maiden courts the unworthy and scornful Bertrand; he has, no doubt, from his own point of view, many excuses for his conduct, but unfortunately, in the last act, Shakespeare seems to have deliberately added to our difficulties by representing him in such a despicable light, that we cannot help agreeing with the opinion previously expressed by his own mother when she calls him the "unworthy husband of his wife" (Act III, Sc. iv).

Coleridge, referring to Helena, calls her Shakespeare's "loveliest character."

Mrs. Jameson says: "All the circumstances and details with which Helena is surrounded

are shocking to our feelings and wounding to our delicacy ; and yet the beauty of the character is made to triumph over all." It is possible that the history of the play gives a clue to some of the difficulties in connection with it. It appears from an early list of plays written by Shakespeare, compiled by one Francis Meres in 1598, that there was a comedy called "Love's Labour Won." No such comedy has come down to us, and it has therefore been conjectured that it was an early version of the present play, and if this is so, it is quite possible, that Shakespeare, when his art was matured, redirected his attention to his youthful work, and "All's Well that Ends Well" was the outcome. This theory would account for several metrical difficulties, and also for the presence of certain scenes and matter which many would wish absent, but perhaps as these passages had been successful on the stage, the practical Shakespeare for once got the better of the poetical Shakespeare. The drama was not printed until it appeared in the First Folio. It was founded on the adventures of Giletta of Narbona in Boccaccio's "Decameron." The King, Lefeu, and the Countess, are all delightful studies of old age, while the braggart Parolles is a supremely comic and truthful creation, about which we should have heard more had he not been overshadowed by Falstaff. The subject-matter makes the play difficult to produce before a modern audience, but it was included in Phelps' celebrated series at Sadler's Wells, being played in 1852.

The Taming of the Shrew.—This comedy was not printed until the publication of the Folio. It is founded on an old play entitled "The Taming of a Shrew," and is a strong, merry, somewhat farcical piece of work, touched, however, by the thoughtfulness and tenderness of Shakespeare, and especially in the last act, glorified by his magnificent poetry. It has been very popular on the stage, the most memorable performance in later days being the revival by Mr. A. Daly, in which Miss Ada Rehan was superb in the part of Katherine. The story is an Italian one, supposed to be represented by a company of strolling players who are retained by a noble lord for the purpose of assisting him in carrying out an elaborate practical joke of the "Sleeper Awakened" order, which he is perpetrating upon a drunken tinker known as Christopher Sly. This Induction is the most interesting and valuable part of the work. Not only is the fun redolent of Elizabethan rural affairs, but it has a direct bearing upon the poet's biography. Warwickshire names and allusions frequently occur, and as previously mentioned (p. 30) they seem reminiscent of a recent visit to Stratford.

Henry IV, Parts I and II. Henry V. The Merry Wives of Windsor.—It is convenient to discuss these four plays together, because they contain the characters of the poet's hero king, Henry V, and Sir John Falstaff, that greater hero who has conquered the world and earned for himself the position of "the sweetest rogue in Christendom." Falstaff is the most perfect achievement of comedy

in all literature. The two parts of Henry IV and Henry V were founded upon "The Chronicles of Holinshed" and an old play entitled "The Famous Victories of Henry V." The genesis of "The Merry Wives of Windsor" has been already alluded to (p. 30), and though incidents in the comedy may probably be traced to earlier plays and stories, the plot is one which a capable dramatist could easily invent, having regard to the purpose for which the play was required. All the dramas now under consideration have been constantly seen upon the stage, but mention should be made of the recent revival of "The Merry Wives of Windsor," in which Mr. Tree took the part of Falstaff, Miss E. Terry and Mrs. Kendal appearing as the Merry Wives. To enumerate all the actors who have played the parts of Falstaff, Hotspur, Henry IV, and Prince Hal, would occupy more space than can be devoted here to the plays themselves. The trilogy which celebrates the life of Shakespeare's hero, King Henry V, is admittedly the greatest historical drama in the world. The "dry bones" of the early "Chronicles" live again at the creative touch of the master, and so far from dwarfing history (as is so often the case in plays of this class), the magnificent generalization and stately action combined with the wit and humour of Falstaff and his companions, raise the whole conception to a grandeur which makes these dramas a commentary on men and things of world-wide significance and everlasting application.

It is to this remarkable height that Shake-

speare has raised the old chronicle play, doing for it, in fact, what he has done for the crude early comedy in "Twelfth Night," and for the "tragedy of blood" in "Hamlet." King Henry has previously appeared as Bolingbroke in Richard II, and in the first and second parts of Henry IV the psychological significance of the character is completed in a masterly manner. [Nothing can be finer or more pathetic than the picture of the weary, but still wily, king. His interviews with his son and their mutual relationship are profoundly fascinating and instructive. "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."] Hotspur, who appears only in Henry IV, Part I, is a creation of extraordinary vigour and originality, but to discuss the fidelity of the portrait and the life-like way in which it is contrasted with the other persons of the drama, and especially with the youthful Harry, is impossible here.

One of the surest tests as to the literary value and position of any author is to think generally of his works and then see how many of his characters spring forward to meet us with all the vitality of real friends or enemies. It is by this test that we place Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray, in their true pre-eminent positions, while applied to Shakespeare we see at once why he is all—and more—than is claimed for him.

✕ At the mention of his potent name crowds of men, women, children, fairies, ghosts, witches, and monsters, spring up to the mind's eye, transfer themselves bodily from his pages to the stage, and thence pass into the world with all the

vitality of real persons, so that to-day Falstaff and Hamlet are as well known as Wellington and Bonaparte. The shortest list of some of the principal characters in the present plays will prove this. We know and appreciate Prince John of Lancaster, the capable and "wily" son of a wily father; the fierce, arrogant, vacillating, and yet lovable Northumberland; his fiery son, Hotspur; the superstitious, vain, valorous Welshman, Glendower; the noble Lady Northumberland; the sweet and loving wife, Lady Percy, contrasted with Dame Quickly and Doll Tearsheet, those inimitable drawings from the life; the followers of Falstaff; the braggart, Pistol; the drunken, faithful Bardolph; the aristocratic Poins; Mr. Justice Shallow, that eminent J.P., and his cousin Silence. The raw recruits, whose names alone would immortalize them—Mouldy, Shadow, Wart, Feeble and Bullcalf; the seasoned soldiers, Bates and Williams; the fiery, kindly Fluellen; Katherine, the gracious princess of France, with "sweet Anne Page" the English country girl; Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page, who are as wise as they are merry, and as bold as they are true; the jealous husband, Ford; the genial parson, Evans; Mine Host of the Garter; Dr. Caius, the peppery French physician; the redoubtable Slender, all these, and many more, help to fill up the grand canvas upon which Prince Hal and Falstaff are painted at full-length. What can be said of the generous, riotous Prince, gradually putting away evil and becoming the modest kingly hero? What can be said of Falstaff the imperishable? who is

“not only witty himself, but is the cause of wit in others.” We must read of them again and again in some of the most delightful scenes ever penned. No one should ever say “Sir John Falstaff,” for if we only read about him, the dear old rogue becomes a friend for life, and he himself tells us that he is “Jack Falstaff with his familiars.”

Much Ado about Nothing.—The almost tragic story of Hero and Claudio is supposed to be adapted from Ariosto’s “Orlando Furioso,” translated in 1591, but the characters of Benedict and Beatrice, which form the most entrancing feature of the comedy, were the creations of Shakespeare, as also were the humours of Dogberry and Verges. Dogberry was first played by Kemp, a celebrated comic actor and a member of Shakespeare’s company. Benedict and Beatrice have been essayed by all aspirants for the highest comedy honours. Garrick found in the part of Benedict one of his favourite impersonations. Henderson, Lee, Chas. Kemble, Macready, C. Kean, Walter Lacey, H. Vezin, and Irving, have all shone as Benedict, while Mrs. Pritchard, Mrs. Abington, Mrs. Barry, Mrs. Siddons, Mrs. C. Kean, Miss Ada Cavendish, Miss Herbert, and Miss Ellen Terry, are amongst the most celebrated exponents of Beatrice. Only one quarto edition appeared, which was published in 1600, although it is clear that the piece was a great favourite when originally produced. It is interesting to compare this play with “Love’s Labour’s Lost,” and some of the other earlier comedies, in order to gain some idea of the immense improvement

made by Shakespeare in his art. As is the case with every other human effort there are imperfections in this work, but taken altogether it is one of the best and brightest comedies in the world. The characters of the young men in this and other plays are well worthy of study and comparison, as exhibiting the virtues and vices of the Elizabethan gallants. They are—on the whole—sketched with a loving hand, but Claudio, in the present play, Bertram, Lucio, and others, present portraits which demonstrate how the pursuit of pleasure as an end in life was as detrimental to character then as now. The varnish and polish are all there, but they fail to conceal entirely some ugly features. As pointed out by Ruskin, the heroes cannot be compared with the heroines. Beatrice is a grand lady of the Renaissance. Her freedom of speech is remarkable, and so is the worth of her heart. She is unmistakably an aristocrat, but she is also a strong, sensible woman. When she and Benedict marry each other out of pity, it has been argued by some critics that their married life would be far from tranquil, but I think their essential sobriety and goodness would prevent any serious matrimonial complications. Shakespeare was a great advocate for marriage. He never ceases to recommend the state of matrimony, and from his lightest and even obscene passages, to his most weighty and poetical utterances he always points out the dignity of the marriage state, and how absolutely essential it is to the well-being of the nation. Love matches and large families, as

opposed to the marriage of convenience and one or two sickly pampered children.

As You Like It.—Our difficulties increase as we proceed with this brief chronicle, for the masterpieces come crowding in one after another, and to say anything adequate is impossible. How can justice be done to Rosalind, Celia, Phœbe, and Audrey, four absolutely different types of womanhood, delineated and contrasted with unerring skill and charm? In all the long list of Shakespeare's heroines, Rosalind is one of the brightest and most delightful, and fortunately Shakespeare—as if to make amends for the unworthy heroes of some of the other plays—has matched her with a lover who is as modest as he is brave. Orlando is a "real" gentleman in the true sense of the word, and such a one as all fathers would wish their sons to be. Then we have Touchstone, the faithful, wise, and witty jester, and "the melancholy Jaques," by means of whom the poet first sounded that note of pessimism, which, in the tragedies, swelled to a discord only to be stilled by those higher harmonies evoked by the later works. And, above all, the wondrous atmosphere of sylvan life! Where was—or rather is—that enchanted Forest of Arden, where the banished Duke and his companions, "like Robin Hood of England, fleeted the time carelessly as they did in the Golden World"? Some of the names of the personages are French, such as Amiens, Jaques, Le Beau; but others are English, as Oliver, William; others again have a classical note as Corin, Silvius, and perhaps in this diverse

nomenclature the Poet passes a hint, and we must seek for the real Forest of Arden, not in Burgundy or Warwickshire, but in that land where we may hope to come "across the seashore in Bohemia," the "wood near Athens," and the desert island of "The Tempest." The songs included in this comedy are among the most lovely that even Shakespeare ever wrote, while the glamour of romance, the woodland lore, the country humour contrasted with the town wit, the poetry, the fun, the inimitable lightness and sureness of touch, all combine to produce a whole before which criticism is disarmed. The first duty of sound criticism is to praise properly, and where praise becomes simply joy—as it does here—all adverse comments are beside the mark. One of the most delightful and pathetic minor parts is that of the faithful retainer Adam, and there is good ground for believing that Shakespeare played this character. This is the most important fact in the stage history of "As You Like It." Coleridge, speaking of this, says that he entertains a firm conviction that "Shakespeare, in the best sense of the word, was a very great actor." He continues, "think of the scene between Adam and Orlando, and think again that the actor of that part had to carry the author of that play in his arms!" Peg Woffington, Mrs. Pritchard, Mrs. Siddons, and Mrs. Jordan, the latter especially, all successfully appeared as Rosalind, while in recent times, Miss Litton, Mrs. Kendal, and Miss Julia Neilson, have also played the part. The plot was taken from a novel by Lodge.

Twelfth Night. — This comedy was never printed until it appeared in the Folio of 1623. It was first produced on February 2nd, 1601-2, at the Middle Temple Hall, as appears from the diary of John Manningham, who saw it acted. In the entry referring to it, he discusses the source of the plot, and tells, in some detail, the action of the piece as it affects Malvolio. One of the most interesting points in connexion with "*Twelfth Night*" is to compare it with the comedies of Ben Jonson. To do this throws many side-lights upon the contemporary stage. When it was produced, Jonson was beginning his notable career. His great comedy, "*Every Man in his Humour*," had been produced at the Globe Theatre in 1598, tradition alleging that it was through the good offices of Shakespeare that the play was accepted, and that he himself took one of the parts. Shakespeare therefore was fully acquainted with Jonson, his works, and his art theories, indeed, the author had set them out with much force in the prologue to his comedy. He says his play contains:

Deeds and language such as men do use:
And persons, such as comedy would choose.

He was for realistic rather than romantic comedy. When he drew his portraits he exhibited what he called their various "*humours*." What he meant by this he explained in the Introduction to "*Every man out of his Humour*."

As when some one peculiar quality
Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw
All his affects, his spirits, and his powers,

In their confluents, all to run one way,
This may be truly said to be a humour.

This is excellent in moderation, but carried too far, it tends to caricature rather than to character. Shakespeare in "Twelfth Night" appears to have given the Jonsonian theory a trial as far as he could, but the irrepressible spirit of poetry and romance would not be denied, and we might describe Shakespeare's muse in this comedy in the words he addressed to Queen Elizabeth in the "Midsummer Night's Dream," when he said that

The imperial Votaress passed on,
In maiden meditation, fancy free.

His genius could not be controlled by any realistic art formula. Nevertheless, we do find many "humours" in Ben Jonson's sense of the word. The very names, Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, remind us of the Down-right, Well-bred, Cash, and others of Jonson's comedy, while Malvolio appears to have been written quite on the lines above quoted. His "affections," "spirits," and "powers," are such as would command respect, but his "one peculiar quality" of vanity so possesses the man that it may truly be said to be his "humour."

Sir Henry Irving and Mr. Tree have both revived this comedy, and its stage record is very long, as Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Malvolio, Maria, and Viola, are all remarkably good parts from a theatrical point of view.

Julius Caesar is only the nominal hero of the noble tragedy that bears his name. Brutus is the

real hero, and even he has formidable rivals in Antony and Cassius, so that our interest and sympathies are constantly shifting from one person to another. The play is not as a whole so well known as some of the other tragedies. Certain episodes are constantly quoted, but they are far more impressive when taken with the context; they should not be treated as isolated jewels, but as part of a royal crown of exquisite workmanship. The death of Caesar at the end of the third act seems at first an anticlimax, but this is not so in reality, for when Brutus exclaims

O Julius Caesar thou art mighty yet!
Thy Spirit walks abroad, and turns our swords
In our own proper entrails.

we understand the lesson the poet was anxious to impress upon us. Another difficulty about the play is the view taken by Shakespeare as to the character of Caesar. Why did he represent "the foremost man in all the world" (as he himself calls him) in only a few short scenes, and even then exhibit him as vacillating, pompous, arrogant, deaf, and subject to epilepsy? The answer is that the play was founded on North's translation of Plutarch, and there Caesar is so depicted towards the close of his career, and the play is the tragedy and not the life of Julius Caesar. It exhibits the stormy sunset of a long and magnificent day. The characters of Brutus and Cassius are finely contrasted. Cassius is the politician who plays the game for his own ends rather than the public good. Ethically, his aims and methods are dishonest, but his force of char-

acter is such that if he is successful in his plans, his schemes work more general good than is effected by the nobler instincts of better men. Brutus is so anxious to keep his hands clean that he fails to use the only means available and thus involves himself and his friends in the penalties of palpable failure. Antony is the hero of another play, and will be alluded to later on (see page 78). Another point may be referred to which applies equally well to the other classical plays (especially, perhaps, "Troilus and Cressida") which has before been incidentally alluded to (p. 13). That is the extent of Shakespeare's classical attainments. In his Roman and Greek plays he seems quite careless as to anachronisms, and frequently uses the language and similes of mediaeval chivalry rather than of Rome or Athens. But his work is ultimately related to the deeper recesses of the heart and intellect, and we lose much of its force if we persist in connecting it with the outward aspect of affairs only. If he had admitted nothing to offend the scholar he could not have driven home his message with equal force. What he wants to enforce is not the archaeology of a past age, but

The constant service of the antique world.

And that he was right in this is best seen by a comparison of his Roman plays with those of Ben Jonson. As Mr. Frank Marshall says, "Jonson has given us skilfully modelled and admirably sculptured statues, but Shakespeare living men and women."

Hamlet.—This play is separately considered in Part IV. (p. 107).

Troilus and Cressida is supposed to have been written and acted about 1603. Two editions were published in 1609. It was included in the 1623 Folio, but curiously its name was omitted from the list of contents prefixed to the volume. Its literary history is obscure, and it has never been a stage success, but like all that bears indisputable evidence of Shakespeare's workmanship, it will well repay study. Many of the characters are extremely interesting. Cressida is the incarnation of a coquette. She does not appear to deserve the scorn with which Shakespeare portrays her and comments upon her; but when we consider the point we find that, as usual, he is right—for conduct such as hers works more harm to the community than sins apparently far more flagrant. Wantonness and instability, especially when exhibited under the guise of sweet loving maidenhood, are utterly subversive of all true ideals. What tragedy there is in the play arises from the loyalty of Troilus to this despicable heroine. Attracted by her youthful beauty, his passions inflamed by the arts and devices of the disreputable Pandarus, there is little wonder that he falls a victim to her wiles, and when he discovers her perfidy, all his ideas as to the purity, faithfulness, and modesty of woman are scattered to the winds. Thersites is well described as "a deformed and scurrilous Grecian." He rails at everything and everybody, so that if, as Hamlet says, "there's nothing good or bad but thinking

makes it so," then, as he never thinks anything but evil, the world to him *is* evil, and he is practically a devil in hell. This portrait, which at first is only disgusting, becomes upon consideration well worthy of serious thought. He is almost worse than Caliban, for he possesses brain power which he wilfully misuses. Ulysses is also most interesting. Here we see a man who has lost all the illusions of youth, but yet preserved enough self-respect to make him kindly and anxious to do all that is possible to better a condition of affairs which his knowledge of the world tells him is the natural result of the follies of those who suffer. Shakespeare, by placing the action of this play so far back into antiquity, and by treating it in an ironical tone, seems to say to us, "These things are bad, very bad, but are they worth regarding seriously? What does it all matter to us?"

Othello.—The answer to the foregoing question is here given with unexampled power. The problem of evil must be considered. We cannot escape from it. This drama is the most realistic, the most poignant, the most intimate of all the great tragedies. It does not happen in far-off times. It is a story of Italy in Shakespeare's time. We cannot say that it is nothing to us, for it is so domestic in its essence that no one, high or low, is untouched by it. The persons who suffer are so real, so good, so simple, that we tremble at the power of evil as exemplified in Iago. It is no world catastrophe, it happens within closed doors. "A man's foes are those of his own house."

“Mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, hath lifted up his heel against me.” Iago has no excuse for the mischief he works. He pretends sometimes that he has, but the devilish glee with which he forms and executes his plot, convinces us that he merely suggests to himself that it is revenge which is his motive, in order to add another piquant flavour to the relish of his sin. We cannot in this world escape from the power of evil; we cannot learn to fear and even partially to understand it better than by reading and thinking about Iago. Many points about him strike us at first as overdone and bizarre, which, on reflection, we are constrained to admit are startlingly true. How could Othello have been deceived by such a man? Hardly a week passes without the story being corroborated. How could a man so brave, so tender, and so loving, be driven to commit so atrocious a murder? The chronicles of jealousy are written day by day. Could a woman so modest, sweet, and pure as Desdemona deprive herself of her parents, her home and her position to risk all for the love of one in many respects so unsuitable, and continue to love him even while he killed her? We know that such instances of woman’s devotion are of daily occurrence. It is because of the apparent inevitability and commonness of all the incidents and characters of this great play that the end comes with such crushing and stupendous force. Betterton, Booth, Quin, Garrick, Barry, Henderson, Edmund Kean, Macready, Phelps, Irving, Edwin Booth, and Salvini have all been cele-

brated Othellos in their time. Most of these great actors have also appeared as Iago. Othello was considered by many as the greatest triumph of Edmund Kean. Sir Henry Irving especially distinguished himself as Iago, the part being particularly suited to exhibit one of the most characteristic phases of his art. He and Edwin Booth alternated the parts of Othello and Iago at the Lyceum revival, Miss Ellen Terry appearing as Desdemona. Othello was published in quarto in 1622, and next year, of course, included in the Folio. It was founded upon a story called "The Moor of Venice," included in Cinthio's "Hecatommithi," of which work there does not seem to have been an English translation in Shakespeare's time. If he was not able to read it in the original Italian, it must have been read to him or translated privately for him. Either of these alternatives would have been quite easy, but the matter has nevertheless given rise to much discussion.

Measure for Measure.—This play is included in the comedies, but it is essentially tragic. It ends without death, and there is plenty of laughter, but the fun is provided by the humours of some of the very scum of creation, and the laughter which they provoke at first seems of a different character from that which is usual with Shakespeare. Coming as the play does in the midst of the great tragedies, when the poet was evidently thinking and troubling over the problems of life, death, and sin, he seems to have had some difficulty in writing comedy. He does

so, however, in obedience to the public demand and with no abatement of power, but with a mordant impressiveness which seems to say, "You want to laugh? laugh at these wretched objects! they are undeniably true portraits and undeniably funny."

But though the laughter which comes quite readily seems to be unlike the usual Shakespearian fun, yet, ultimately, even Lucio, the fantastic, Elbow, the simple constable, Pompey, servant to Mistress Overdone, Abhorson, the executioner, and that terrible person Bernardine, the dissolute prisoner, take their places in the scheme of Shakespeare's almost unlimited sympathy, for these justify themselves, and we are constrained to say, "God made them, and therefore let them pass for men." In the Duke, who plays the part of Providence, Angelo the Deputy, Claudio and his sister Isabella, the poet found characters which provided him with the material for the worthy exercise of his powers. The scenes between Isabella and Angelo, and between Isabella and Claudio rank with the finest and most thoughtful of his work. The psychological interest of the relationship between Isabella and Angelo is absorbing, while the poetry in which it is recorded combines exquisite beauty with an almost miraculous power of insight into the deeper recesses of human nature. Claudio's apprehension and description of death is one of the greatest achievements in poetry. Coleridge, speaking of "Measure for Measure," says it is "the single exception to the delightfulness of

Shakespeare's plays. It is a hateful work, although Shakespearian throughout. Our feelings of justice are grossly wounded in Angelo's escape. Isabella herself contrives to be unamiable, and Claudio is detestable." Coleridge is wrong, and it is because so consummate a critic is sometimes betrayed into false judgement that we are justified in forming our own opinion even upon the greatest work of art. "Measure for Measure" is one of the most valuable of Shakespeare's plays. There are many minor points of interest in connection with the work, such as Shakespeare's attitude towards the Puritans, and the suggested eulogy on King James I in the person of the Duke. The nature of the story unfortunately renders the play difficult to produce before a modern audience, but it was played at the Haymarket Theatre in 1876, when the late Miss A. Neilson was Isabella, and Buckstone, Pompey. Phelps included it in his series of revivals at Sadler's Wells, and Mrs. Siddons was very successful as Isabella. The plot is taken from "The Right Excellent and Faire Hystorie of Promus and Cassandra," 1578, and the play was first printed in the Folio of 1623.

Macbeth.—This great tragedy is founded on Holinshed's "Chronicles." It was never published until the 1623 Folio was issued, and the copy from which it was printed appears to have been incomplete and inaccurate. It was produced and played before the King, probably in 1605, and on the 20th of April, 1610, Dr. Simon Forman, an astrologer and quack, saw it acted at the Globe,

and entered many particulars thereof in a MS. book which he called "Book of Plaies and Notes thereof." There is one item of interest as regards the mounting of plays, for Dr. Forman says Macbeth and Banquo entered on horseback. The rapidity and directness of the action of the play have frequently been pointed out and commented upon; when once it begins there is no pause, but we are swept into the current which rushes to the catastrophe. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth monopolize nearly all the attention, and—with the exception of the scenes where Macduff bewails the fate of his wife and children, and fights with Macbeth,—from an actor's point of view, there are only two parts. Nearly all tragic actors of the first rank have appeared as Macbeth. The part, like Hamlet, "plays itself" to a certain extent, and while perfection can be reached by none, all can achieve excellence. The same remark applies to Lady Macbeth, but among the many famous actresses who have played the part, Mrs. Siddons appears to have been its greatest exponent.

Terror is the dominant note of Macbeth, as Pity is of Lear. The tragedy opens in "thunder, lightning, and in rain," upon a "blasted heath." The first flash reveals the three witches hovering in the "foul and filthy air," and their malign influence pervades the story. One of the greatest achievements of Shakespeare is his treatment of the supernatural. The witches in "Macbeth" speak the current language of Elizabethan demonology, but we cannot for a moment mistake them for

the toothless old crones who, having confessed a compact with the devil, were burnt alive upon their own confession. They stand for much more than this, and are the embodiment of Fate. They inspire awe in a marked degree. Why or how this is so we cannot say, but the effect is there. So with the ghost in "Hamlet," the fairies in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and Ariel in "The Tempest." The contemporary superstitions are taken by the poet, but so presented, that suddenly we seem to be on the point of understanding the mysteries from whence these superstitions spring. We feel that the veil will now be lifted, and that we shall realize something of that universal life which fills the universe, but which at present is hidden from us. Shakespeare anticipates the most recent researches and justifies the most insane superstitions. Macbeth and his wife are terrible criminals, but what makes them so interesting to us is not their crimes but their humanity. Lady Macbeth is logically and intellectually brave, Macbeth is physically brave, but both of them are ultimately at the mercy of their nerves, which are rendered abnormally sensitive by their consciousness of sin. They are frequently talking about sleep, but they have "murdered sleep," and when we have read this terrible play, we are haunted by the picture of these poor sleepless sinners clinging to each other, but going their separate ways to death, the woman succumbing to the horror of her own thoughts, the man hunted to his death, the victim of his own superstition.

King Lear.—In this tragedy the genius of Shakespeare rises to its topmost height. In many respects there is no other work in the literature of the world to compare with it. It is interesting to contrast it for a moment with "Othello." There the drama is a domestic one. We can conceive that in a short time after the catastrophe that the ordinary daily life in Venice would resume its normal course, but we cannot thus narrowly think of "King Lear." Here the tragedy shakes, not a family but a kingdom. The number and rank of the persons who suffer—the fact of the events recorded happening in a remote and savage past—the wonderful way in which the fierce and uncontrolled powers of nature are introduced to form a background of horror—the terrible humour of the Fool, who acts as chorus to the play—the inevitable ruin, which, arising from the senile decay of the King, spreading like a flood engulfs both good and bad—these all serve to give us the impression that we are witnessing the upheaval of a world, and yet, above all, pity is the strongest note. And this pity is evoked, not by the fate of lovers and heroes, but by the sad story of "a very foolish, fond old man," not in his "perfect mind"—a man who, in the ordinary course, had but little time to live. Why should fate thus pursue him to the edge of his grave? The story is almost a fairy tale, but the power and pathos make it realistic and terrible in the highest degree. In Regan and Goneril, Shakespeare has created women who for pure wickedness can only be compared with

Iago. Their callous, calm cruelty can only be explained by considering that Shakespeare's knowledge of evil was of necessity equal to his knowledge of good. One is the complement of the other. His range of vision was so far beyond the ordinary, that as he could understand and appreciate Imogen, Miranda, and Cordelia, so he was made aware of the possibility of Regan and Goneril, and as he saw them, so he drew them. It is their naturalness that makes us shudder. Their sister, Cordelia, is a ray of light in darkness. She is truth incarnate. At the beginning this very quality seems to render her unsympathetic, but later we see why her purity could not condescend to any false conventionalities, and she is revealed to us as a flawless gem of womanhood. Kent, Gloster, Edmund, Edgar, and the Fool are all delineated and contrasted with consummate art. The whole poem is saturated with the deepest and most pregnant thought, but it gives us the idea that it was written during the darkest hours in the poet's life. If this be so, then we can only be devoutly thankful for the wisdom and pathos which were evolved out of this descent into hell. Two quarto editions of the tragedy were published before it was included in the Folio of 1623. There was a previous play on the same subject called the "Chronicle History of King Leir," which was founded on material in Holinshed's "Chronicle." Shakespeare probably used both the play and the "Chronicle," but the episode of Gloster and his two sons is taken from Sir Philip Sidney's "Arcadia." The play

was acted before King James in 1606, and has been a popular play ever since, being frequently revived. Betterton, Garrick, Barry, Young, Edmund and Charles Kean, Macready, Phelps, and Irving, have all appeared as King Lear.

Antony and Cleopatra.—Although the subordinate characters in this great play are drawn with the easy mastery which characterize Shakespeare at his best, yet it is evident that the delineation of the royal lovers was his first care, and was the reason why he was attracted to the subject. In writing "Julius Caesar," his attention had been called to the possibilities of the material provided by the character of Antony as represented by Plutarch in his life of Marcus Antonius. The fidelity with which he followed the original is evidence of the importance he attached to it, but, as usual, he imparted such vivid, vital touches that the man with all his wasted powers and artistic instincts lives before us. There was much also in the nature of the story which appears to have appealed to the poet's disturbed state of mind. One thing, however, strikes us forcibly when reading the play, and that is that Shakespeare was not altogether unsympathetic in his dealings with the lovers. He does not despise Cleopatra as he despised Cressida, and although he exposes with exquisite irony the weakness which led Antony to destruction, he still manages to impress us with the innate nobility of the man, so that, in the end, it is the overthrow of the noble mind that moves us, rather than the physical death of the hero. This is the distinc-

tion between true tragedy and the "tragedy of blood," which so easily degenerates into what is generally understood by melodrama. Antony shows us the havoc wrought by the artistic temperament and the pursuit of pleasure where they are allowed to override the sense of duty. He was an artist, a poet, brave as a lion, handsome as a god, courteous, kindly, and yet with such an absence of moral force that he ultimately becomes the slave of his passions and a by-word amongst his fellows. He was too clear to be under any misapprehension with regard to the facts. Of his love for Cleopatra he says:

These strong Egyptian fetters I must break
Or lose myself in dotage.

Of himself he says—

I have offended reputation—
A most unnoble swerving.

And yet at the crisis of his fate, he exclaims:

Come, let's have one other gaudy night.

Life is shipwrecked where duty is not at the helm, and this moral shipwreck is generally the work of a "Siren." Cleopatra, that "serpent of old Nile," is the most wonderful embodiment of sex in literature.

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety: other women cloy
The appetite they feed: but she makes hungry
When most she satisfies: for vilest things
Become themselves in her.

In no other study does Shakespeare more triumphantly prove the truth of his dictum that

There is some soul of goodness in things evil,

and the difference, perhaps, between Cleopatra and Cressida may be partially appreciated by remembering that though there may be a "soul of goodness in things evil," there cannot be a soul at all in things trivial. The play was first published in the Folio, and has frequently been acted, but on the whole the later revivals have been more memorable for scenic decoration than for acting. Like Juliet, the part of Cleopatra is difficult to represent satisfactorily, for an actress who possesses the passion and the beauty to embody the part physically frequently fails to fulfil its intellectual requirements.

Coriolanus is another example of the fact that at this period of his life the powers of Shakespeare were so transcendent that he never wrote a play alone without producing a masterpiece. Nearly all the great tragedies are inspired by the desire to exhibit the ultimate consequences of some great master passion. Thus "Macbeth" is the tragedy of ambition, "Othello" of jealousy, "Antony and Cleopatra" of lust, and "Coriolanus" of pride. It is no doubt the applicability of the moral of these works to the fate of some of the great nobles who were Shakespeare's friends and contemporaries, which have led to such minute and fantastic theories as to his inner life. Coriolanus, like Antony, was noble, kindly, patriotic, but his besetting sin mastered him, and

his pride conducted him to death and dishonour. Virgilia, his wife, Volumnia, his mother, Menenius, his friend, and Aufidius, his rival, are all realistic and delightful portraits, while Shakespeare's views as to the masses have nowhere been expressed with greater freedom than in this play. It has been observed how lovingly Shakespeare deals with individual clowns and fools, and here we see how angry he can be with them collectively. Hence it has been argued that he hated the masses. He hated and deprecated what a number of fools would naturally do if they were intrusted with political power, but that did not prevent him from "suffering fools gladly" when dealing with them as individual human beings. Fools should be trained, taught, and loved, but not allowed, because they are many, to rule their betters. On the other hand, those who rule must be real aristocrats, otherwise they meet their deserts—as did Coriolanus—at the hands of those whom they despise.

He, who the sword of Heaven will bear
Should be as holy as severe:

The tragedy was not published until it appeared in the first Folio. The Kembles will always be associated with its stage reminiscences. Mrs. Siddons was superb in the part of Volumnia; Macready and Phelps were excellent as Coriolanus. Sir Henry Irving also appeared in the part, with Miss Terry as Volumnia. The scenery was from designs by Sir Alma Tadema, but the revival was not one of the greatest Lyceum successes.

Timon of Athens. Pericles. Henry VIII.—These three plays, so widely different in many respects, may be mentioned together inasmuch as they are examples of Shakespeare's later collaboration (see page 34). Acts I, II and IV of "Timon of Athens" are considered to have been contributed by him, while the story of Marina in "Pericles"—a most lovely episode inserted in an otherwise unsatisfactory and loosely constructed play—is undoubtedly his. The questions raised as to the authorship of "Henry VIII" are more difficult, inasmuch as Shakespeare's co-worker in this play was no less a person than John Fletcher, whose standing as a poet was—on the contemporary stage—almost, if not quite, equal to that of Shakespeare himself. After-generations have formed a better appreciation of their respective powers. It is probable that the scenes in which Queen Katherine appears were contributed by Shakespeare. The character, although taken from history, presents a type of womanhood which, in his later life, strongly appealed to him, and is in several particulars reminiscent of Hermione in "A Winter's Tale," just as Marina in "Pericles" is a study for Perdita and Miranda.

It is probable that these plays represent unfinished works which were completed for the stage by other hands. Thus "Timon of Athens" and "Pericles" are generally considered to have been written before "Antony and Cleopatra" and "Coriolanus." We can imagine that the scorn for the whole race of mankind which is so

pronounced a feature in "Timon of Athens," was only a passing pessimism, and that when the writer recovered his normal balance of mind, he would feel that he could not complete a play which was an overstatement and caricature of humanity. As regards the Marina episode, we may conjecture that as a practical playwright, jealous for the good name of the theatre, Shakespeare would recognize the difficulties of the setting, and thought to embody his idea in more appropriate surroundings, as indeed he did in "The Winter's Tale" and "The Tempest." It is much to be wished that the episode had not been inserted in the careless and comparatively worthless play of "Pericles."

"Pericles" was not included in the first Folio, but "Timon of Athens" and "Henry VIII" were. The latter play has had a long and distinguished career on the stage, the parts of the King, the Queen, and Cardinal Wolsey affording magnificent opportunities for acting. The last important revival was at the Lyceum in 1892.

Cymbeline. A Winter's Tale. The Tempest.—These three noble plays form the epilogue to Shakespeare's life work. When reading them we breathe a rare and almost superhuman atmosphere. We do not when recalling them, think of their poetical beauty, their wit, humour, power, or knowledge of the world, though they are full of these qualities, but of a peculiar and gracious wisdom. They have many characteristics in common; as regards style, for instance. Shakespeare had now attained such mastery over his

medium, that in the language of these later plays we find a defect of style begotten, so to say, of its very excellence. The poet's thoughts and intuitions crowd upon him in such profusion that he sometimes tries to pack more matter into the words than they can possibly carry, and thus the excess of thought results in mixed metaphors and ambiguities, while the easy flow of the verse is impeded. Another point they have in common is that they cannot be classed as either comedies or tragedies. They are as serious as tragedy, as delicate and enchanting as comedies. They are romantic dramas, loosely constructed and impossible in their incidents, but universal in their application. Again, they all contain elaborate portraits of women, which for purity, grace, and all the essential virtues of womanhood, have never been approached.

Cymbeline was not printed until it appeared in the Folio of 1623. It was acted about 1610-1611, as Dr. Forman mentions it in his Diary. Shakespeare evolved the romantic plot by combining certain quasi-historical material which he found in Holinshed with a story taken from Boccaccio's "Decameron." The play has often been revived from the times of Garrick to those of Irving. The Lyceum production in September, 1896, was singularly beautiful, Sir Henry making a memorable Iachimo, and Miss Terry a most lovable Imogen. The play was also one of the most successful productions of the Sadler's Wells revivals under the management of Phelps. Mrs. Yates, Mrs. Jordan, Mrs. Siddons,

and in later days Miss Helen Faucit and Miss H. Hodgson are amongst the many actresses who have gained distinction in the part of Imogen. In the delineation of the Queen and Iachimo, Shakespeare recognizes as fully as in his great tragedies the powers of evil, but they are mitigated and rendered comparatively harmless by the worth and purity of Imogen and her brothers. The Queen dies as a result of her own evil practices, while Iachimo repents and is at once pardoned by Imogen and Posthumus, whom he has so deeply wronged. A. C. Swinburne has written such a beautiful tribute to the character of Imogen, that I feel sure I shall be forgiven for quoting a few lines from it. That it is not exaggerated can be easily proved by anyone who will read and think upon what Shakespeare has written. Mr. Swinburne says that Imogen is "the very crown and flower of all her father's daughters. I do not speak here of her human father, but her divine. The woman above all Shakespearian women is Imogen. As in Cleopatra we found the incarnate sex, the woman everlasting, so in Imogen we find half glorified already the immortal godhead of womanhood. I would fain have some honey in my words at parting, and I am therefore something more than fain to close my book upon the name of the woman best beloved in all the world of song, and all the tide of time: upon the name of Shakespeare's Imogen."

A Winter's Tale.—The obliging Dr. Forman has again assisted us in fixing an approximate

date for the first production of this play. He saw it acted at the Globe in 1611, and his memoranda contain many interesting and amusing references to the plot. The three parts of Hermione, Paulina, and Perdita are all so good that the theatrical records show that nearly all the actresses of Shakespearian parts have appeared in one or other of them. The jealous Leontes, although not dominating the play, affords as excellent an opportunity to the tragedian as the rogue Autolycus does to the comedian. Garrick, Macready, Phelps, and Charles Kean, all revived the drama, the last important production being that of Miss Mary Anderson at the Lyceum in 1887, when she doubled the parts of Hermione and Perdita, Mr. Forbes Robertson appearing as Leontes. Shakespeare founded his plot upon a story entitled "Dorastus and Fawnia," written by the unfortunate Greene, whose attack upon the early plays has been mentioned (p. 26). The play was first published in the Folio, 1623. The curious construction and the seemingly wilful carelessness of the allusions to places, people, and events, have caused much merriment to Jonson and other writers, but no doubt Shakespeare understood what he was doing, and I think that by these inaccuracies and discrepancies he simply wished us to bear in mind that truth which R. L. Stevenson has so happily expressed for us when he says, "art is occupied, and bound to be occupied, not so much in making stories true as in making them typical; not so much in capturing the lineaments of each

fact, as in marshalling all of them towards a common end." This is particularly interesting when further considering the relative art of Shakespeare and Jonson. Jonson to-day is dead, so far as theatrical representation is concerned, mostly because his realism has become archaic. Shakespeare, on the other hand, lives on the stage from year to year because his plays are as typical to-day as when they were written, and plays are written to be acted rather than to be read. Thus they reach a far larger and more impressionable audience, and the very incomplete allusions to theatrical history have been inserted in these notes, not because of any intrinsic value, but gradually to impress upon the reader that the future of our theatre very largely depends upon the position which Shakespeare holds upon the contemporary stage. Another point to be mentioned is the way in which Shakespeare, at the end of his career, gave us some of his most irresponsible and almost boyish specimens of humour. Autolycus fairly bubbles over with mirth, and the whole of the rustic and pastoral episodes are instinct with the life, freshness and vivacity of the early comedy. This is rendered additionally delightful by the contrast afforded by the tragic background which could only have been written by the author of "Othello." Again, the same wise and loving physician who exposes the youthful vices of Lucio and Cressida, delights to exhibit and comment upon the virginal purity and health of Florizel and Perdita. And it is further particularly noticeable that

Perdita, although the very essence of purity, has nothing whatever of the prude in her nature.

The Tempest.—The Folio of 1623 opens with this, in all probability the last play ever written by Shakespeare. Speculation has been much exercised as to the foundation for the plot, but the result seems to demonstrate that in this his latest contribution to literature, Shakespeare practically relied upon his own powers and invented the plot, as he did in "Love's Labour's Lost," his earliest attempt. It has been conjectured that a book published in 1610 by Sylvanus Jourdain containing an account of "A Discovery of the Bermudas, otherwise called the Isle of Devils," gave some hints to the writer, and this is probably the case. The stage record of "The Tempest" is, comparatively speaking, not extensive, but a revival at the present time, adequately cast and adorned with the resources of the modern theatre, would in all probability achieve a success such as the play has never yet experienced upon the stage. We are properly warned not to read more into this great poem than the author intended, but we cannot help ourselves. The last recorded utterance of Shakespeare must

Enforce attention like deep harmony,

and whether it was meant or not, the matter and manner of the play inevitably suggest that here Shakespeare embodied his life convictions, summed up his philosophy, and, in the character of Prospero, bade farewell to his art. The mortal characters are simple and well defined types, but they are in direct relationship with beings who

are superhuman in one sense, but subhuman in another. Sir Thomas Browne (who died in 1682), says "there is in this universe a stair, or manifest scale, of creatures, rising not disorderly or in confusion, but with a comely method and proportion." First we have the monster Caliban, half man, half fairy—and wholly beast—then Stephano a drunken butler, then Trinculo, a fool, then Sebastian and Antonio, the selfish men of the world who are essentially murderers, then Gonzalo, the kindly and upright, then Ferdinand and Miranda, the types of pure, youthful humanity, and last, the delicate Ariel, quaint, graceful, but soulless. All these directed, taught, pardoned and loved by the grave magician Prospero. And what do we read of Prospero, the hero of Shakespeare's last play? He suffered long, for he was banished from his kingdom and deprived of his dukedom. He was kind, witness his tender care for his daughter, his rescue of Ariel and his attempt to civilize Caliban. He vaunted not himself, for though master of all magical arts, he only used them to work goodwill. He sought not his own, for his only aim was to secure Miranda's happiness. He was not provoked, for he forgave all that had offended against him. And lastly, he did not behave himself unseemly. He was neither a dry philosopher, nor a fussy parent; he was a gentleman in thought, in word, in deed. He was not perfect—neither was the gentle Shakespeare—but it surely is a matter worthy of remark that the last great creation of the greatest poet was a reticent, calm, humorous, powerful, kindly gentleman.

THE ART OF SHAKESPEARE

SHAKESPEARE was aesthetically and financially the greatest artist of his day. During his lifetime, and within the comparatively narrow bounds of the then English-speaking race, his plays were immensely successful, both on the stage and in the study. Their frequent representation at the popular theatres and at court attest the former, while the publication of the various authorized and unauthorized quartos, attest the latter. After his death, his works began a career of conquest which to-day binds the whole world captive to his art. In 1623 the plays were collected and published in the celebrated work known as the First Folio, in which sixteen dramas were printed for the first time. The editors were John Heminge and Henry Condell, who had been members of the Globe company and fellow actors with Shakespeare. In their preface "to the great variety of readers," they give expression to a desire which has since been universally echoed, when they say "It had been a thing, we confess, worthy to have been wished, that the author himself had lived to have set forth and overseen his own writings." But as this was not

to be, we owe them a debt of gratitude which can never be repaid. According to the custom of the times, a number of eulogistic poems were prefixed to the book, which bear ample testimony to the position Shakespeare had held amongst his contemporaries, and included therein we find Ben Jonson's noble poem, worthy alike of his subject and himself. Jonson, as we know, was one of Shakespeare's most intimate friends, and his greatest dramatic rival. His art was in many respects so different from that of Shakespeare's, and, if followed to extremes, so subversive of some of Shakespeare's art theories, that his praise comes with additional force and point, so that from 1623 to the present time, no more worthy appreciation has ever been penned. Jonson's poem contains the following lines:

Soul of the age,
Th' applause, delight, the wonder of our stage;
again,

Thou art a monument without a tomb,
And art alive still, while thy Book doth live
And we have wits to read, and praise to give.

But the reader is referred to the poem itself, as short quotations do not do it justice. So successful was the first Folio, that in 1632 it was followed by a Second, which is remarkable for another appreciation from one of the greatest past masters in English literature. John Milton, in a memorable line, addresses Shakespeare as

Dear son of memory, great heir of fame.

A Third Folio was called for in 1663.

It is abundantly evident, therefore, that the supremacy of the poet was acknowledged, by those most capable of judging, in his own days and those immediately succeeding. Then came a comparative reaction; but notwithstanding all fluctuations in public taste, the works of Shakespeare held their own, as is proved by the numerous editions which since his death have issued from the press in a steadily increasing stream.

A Fourth Folio was published in 1685, and from that date a mere list of some of the most eminent English editors must serve as an indication of the increasing power and influence of his art. Nicholas Rowe in 1709 edited a valuable edition, then came Pope, Theobald, Hanmer, Warburton, Johnson, Stevens, Malone, Dyce, Staunton, Delius, Singer, Knight, Collier, Phelps, Halliwell, Marshall, and others too numerous to mention. The greatest achievements of histrionic art have also been won by the most eminent actors and actresses in Shakespearian parts. The names of Burbage, Betterton, Garrick, Macklin, Henderson, the Kembles, the Keans, Macready, Phelps, Irving, Tree, amongst the actors, and Mrs. Siddons, Mrs. Jordan, Mrs. Clive, Mrs. Pritchard, Miss Faucit, and Miss Terry amongst the actresses attest this fact. In our own times the greatest leaders of thought have stated in unequivocal terms the magnitude of Shakespeare's achievements. Ruskin says, "Of the scope of Shakespeare I will only say, that the intellectual measure of every man since born in the domain of creative thought may be assigned to him, according to the

degree in which he has been taught by Shakespeare." Carlyle says, "He is the greatest thing we have yet done." Emerson says, "His mind is the horizon beyond which at present we do not see." Robertson, of Brighton, calls him "That all but omniscient Shakespeare." Kingsley says, "His plays are to this day the delight alike of the simple and the wise." And one of the most magnificent appreciations in the language is Matthew Arnold's sonnet beginning with the line

Others abide our question. Thou art free!

There cannot, therefore, be any doubt as to the supreme influence of Shakespeare's art. Why then, do we so often hear it said, "I love to see Shakespeare's plays acted or hear them read aloud, but I cannot read them to myself with pleasure?" The reason is, that at first it is a somewhat difficult matter, and people do not care to take the necessary trouble. This is the case with all literature worth reading, and as Ruskin says, "When you come to a good book you must ask yourselves 'Am I inclined to work as an Australian miner would?' . . . the metal you are in search of being the author's mind or meaning, his words are the rock, which you have to crush and smelt in order to get at it. And your pickaxes are your own care, wit, and learning, your smelting furnace is your own thoughtful soul. Do not hope to get at any good author's meaning without those tools and that fire. Often you will need sharpest, finest chiselling, and patientest fusing before you can gather one grain of the metal." This evidently points to serious

study; but on the other hand, R. L. Stevenson writes: "In anything fit to be called by the name of reading, the process itself should be absorbing and voluptuous: we should gloat over a book, be rapt clean out of ourselves, and rise from the perusal, our minds filled with the busiest, kaleidoscopic dance of images, incapable of sleep or continuous thought. The words, if the book be eloquent, should run thenceforward in our ears like the noise of breakers, and the story, if it be a story, repeat itself in a thousand coloured pictures to the eye." This is the kind of reading we enjoy, and we do not find that it is obtainable from a careless perusal of Shakespeare, but it exactly describes the pleasure we obtain if we only take the trouble to read him aright. For instance, when we have properly read "Macbeth" we are "rapt clean out of ourselves." We see the lightning flashing over the blasted heath, we hear the clash of steel as the wild warriors return victorious from the fight. We shudder at the merciless murder of the innocent Duncan, and when we awake from the terrible scene of Macbeth's death, we are "incapable of sleep or continuous thought." The pity of it thrills us, and the glamour of the tragedy colours our lives for ever. How shall we learn to read Shakespeare to obtain such sensation? By loving him. By looking up to him and trying to sympathize with his calm, clear outlook upon good and evil. Before we can read Shakespeare, we must study him—when we can read him, we cannot help loving him.

No profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en;
In brief, sir, study what you most affect.

What, then, is the way to study Shakespeare in order to be in a position to appreciate his art? Perhaps Ben Jonson gave us a hint when he wrote the lines already quoted:

Soul of the age,
Th' applause, delight, the wonder of our Stage.

This expression seems to imply the familiar idea of the relationship between Body, Soul, and Spirit, and this will serve as a rough guide. There is no need to involve ourselves in subtle distinctions, but let each one take his own idea as to the relationship between Body, Soul, and Spirit, and admit, at any rate for the present purpose, that the work of Shakespeare is thus constituted. Then one important fact at once asserts itself. The body of Shakespeare's work is frankly and purely Elizabethan. We must never forget that Shakespeare was a man of the times. He was not one who "praises with enthusiastic tone, Every century but this, and every country but his own." He was an Englishman—a practical playwright, a man of sound common sense—of like passions with ourselves. And above all, he was a product of that wonderful theatre which blossomed so magically during the English renaissance. R. L. Stevenson says that "all good writers begin at first by consciously imitating their predecessors. Shakespeare himself, the imperial, proceeds directly from a school. It is only from a school that we can have good writers; it is almost invariably from a school that

great writers, these lawless exceptions, issue." I think that the other sections have shown in an imperfect way the truth of this doctrine. Shakespeare, then, was a product of the Elizabethan theatre, which, in its turn, was the highest achievement of "the spacious days of great Elizabeth." It becomes necessary, therefore, to obtain some definite ideas as to the environment of Shakespeare, his material outlook, the facts of his life, the literary methods of his time and other contemporary matters, before we address ourselves to the more difficult questions of his poetry and philosophy. Any knowledge we may gather with regard to the English renaissance in the sixteenth century, or the manners and customs of the times of Elizabeth and James the First, more particularly with reference to social life in town and country, is of the greatest assistance in trying to understand the body of Shakespeare's work. For instance, it is useless to endeavour to come to any conclusion with reference to the Sonnets of Shakespeare until some general idea has been obtained as to the vogue of the sonnet as a form of literary expression, and much of what at first sight is difficult, unsatisfactory and careless in the plays, is explained by a slight knowledge of the contemporary theatre. The body of Shakespeare's work, then, is Elizabethan. It is bold, firm, passionate, and in a word, has all the virtues and vices of the animal body, and if there were nothing beyond the body to consider, many of the attributes which we now call vices would partake more of

the nature of virtues. What is vice in man, is nature in the tiger or goat. This may help to explain the necessity for certain qualities in the body of the poet's works which are apt at first to scare the unthinking. We find ribald jokes, puns, conceits, coarse scenes and expressions jostling with the most perfect poetry and profound philosophy, but we have only to remember the conditions under which plays were then written, revised and published, the mixed nature of the audience at "The Globe," the likelihood of successful "gags" being ultimately embodied in the acting edition, Shakespeare's own condemnation of the practice, "Let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them," and the whole matter, if not clear, is at least not a stumbling block. If we do not like it, we can leave it. If, however, we happen to be fairly well acquainted with contemporary thought, there is much that we are interested in, at any rate from an historical point of view. Much of it is topical and clever, while a comparison of Shakespeare's plays with those of the other dramatists, will prove that he at any rate attempted to make the necessary comic relief an integral part of the play.

Following further the idea of Body, Soul, and Spirit, we shall find that what we may call the Soul of Shakespeare is as we should have expected, related partly to the Body and partly to the Spirit. It is not uninfluenced by the wonderful renaissance we have been considering; it is, as Ben Jonson says, the "Soul of the Age,"

but, as it were, etherealized by the Spirit, and the process results in the profound philosophy and serene outlook which is the true intellectual strength of Shakespeare. Take as an example of this the churchyard scene in "Hamlet." The body of the scene is again Elizabethan. The English churchyard and charnel-house adjacent, making one think of Stratford, and not Elsinore, the burial rites of a suicide as regulated by the common law of England, the humour of the grave diggers smacking more of a Warwickshire village than of our early Danish forefathers; but the wisdom, the humour, the pathos, the pity of it all are as fresh to-day as when the ink was wet from Shakespeare's pen. How this wonderful scene would affect the audience at "The Globe," and touch their rough natures to finer issues, even as it is to-day to us an ever fresh and living source of wonder and delight. It is this Soul of Shakespeare which gives to his works their undying power and authority. They are "not for an age, but for all time." Let us take a few examples. Everywhere to-day we hear the cry that the taste for literature is decreasing. People will read nothing but highly coloured melodrama—questionable farce, puerile pathos, and rubbishing rhetoric. Readers of Shakespeare not only understand, but sympathize. People like melodrama, we get sublime melodrama in "Macbeth" and "Hamlet"; they like farce, we get it in "The Merry Wives of Windsor"; they like pathos, "King Lear" is unapproachable; they like rhetoric, "Henry V" is one gush of irresist-

ible tall talk, and if Shakespeare is composed of these elements, we can understand why those who have never taken the trouble or been taught to read literature, wade in what appears to be such foul water. The reason why the "man in the street" does not read Shakespeare in preference to modern rubbish, is that Shakespeare is written in what, to him, is almost a foreign language, which is only another way of saying the Body is Elizabethan, but the Soul of Shakespeare is vulgar and catholic in the best sense of those much abused words. People should therefore be educated to read Shakespeare as they are taught Latin, and they will then find in his plays the very elements that their souls crave for expressed in poetry which is the high-water mark of literature.

Again, "our fathers have told us" that we must trust the people—that all would be well when the franchise was as it should be—that politics would be pure when democracy came to its own, and so on. This millenium has not yet arrived; so many are disappointed. Shakespeare would have saved us from any such disillusionment. He loved mankind. "What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!" He pitied the poor:

Take physic, Pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou may'st shake the superflux to them,
And show the Heavens more just.

He loved England and the English with a patriotic fervour:

This royal throne of Kings, this scepter'd isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise :
This fortress built by nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war :
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or, as a moat defensive to a house
Against the envy of less happier lands :
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.

But in the works of no other writer do we find such scathing remarks about the masses.

Hang ye ! Trust ye !
With every minute you do change a mind
And call him noble that was now your hate,
Him vile that was your garland.

And yet, that England he loved so well must have been mainly peopled by folk, such as those about whom he said such bitter things. How can we reconcile these views? Shakespeare tells us:

O England ! model to thy inward greatness,
Like little body with a mighty heart,
What might'st thou do, that Honour would thee do,
Were all thy children *kind and natural*.

It is no use trusting to numbers if the units are not kind and natural. It is the kind and natural citizens who really compose the nation ; if they do not fulfil these conditions, the views they express at the poll are not likely to be any better because there are more voters. And what does Shakespeare mean by "kind" and "natural"?

In "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," he sings a little song, beginning:

Who is Silvia? What is she
That all our swains commend her?

The reasons, which according to the youthful Shakespeare, commend her to her admirers, sound at first somewhat surprising:

Holy, fair and wise is she:

Holiness is the first quality to be recognized in a young lady of title, who moved in Society with a freedom which even to-day might be considered excessive. Then she must be "fair," and if she were "holy," it is hardly likely that her fairness would be that of a society beauty to-day, or even that of "Good Queen Bess," with her painted face and enormous farthingale. And "wise," which is a good old word, with a meaning not even remotely connected with competitive examinations. Then we are told how these qualities were acquired:

The Heavens such grace did *lend* her.

Only lent her—and therefore presumably such grace might be withdrawn if improperly used. The purpose for which this grace was lent is even more surprising:

That she might admired be.

But we must find out the Elizabethan meaning of "admired." A quotation from another great English Classic will explain it. "When He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and be *admired* in all them that love Him."

And then Shakespeare inquires in the second verse if she is fulfilling the conditions of her being, and incidentally tells us what he means by kindness:

Is she kind as she is fair?
For beauty lives with kindness;
Love doth to her eyes repair
To help him of his blindness,
And, being help'd, inhabits there.

"Love manifest in the flesh." But in addition to being "kind," we must be "natural." It is in considering what is meant by this word that we gain some knowledge of what Shakespeare thought of evil. He regarded all mankind with an equal eye:

For nought so vile that on the earth doth live
But to the earth some special good doth give.

It is all natural. Iago is as natural as Prospero. Lady Macbeth, Regan and Goneril, as true to nature as Juliet, Imogen and Cordelia. Beatrice, Rosalind and Helena do and say things that would horrify our modern dames, but as they are natural we have no difficulty in recognizing them as ladies. Falstaff is a misleader of youth, but we "better could have spared a better man," so that even when Shakespeare descends almost into hell, as he does in "Timon of Athens," we still feel safe with him, for he never lets go the golden thread of naturalness, which leads him through the labyrinth of evil, and makes him emerge on the quiet, sunny heights of his last plays, knowing for a certainty that,

There is some *soul* of goodness in things evil
Would men observingly distil it out.

Some soul of goodness—the body may be, and frequently is, evil, and the process by which we may assure ourselves of the soul of goodness in things evil is the difficult and painful one of distillation. We all see and acknowledge evil, and some tilt against it, making no more impression than Don Quixote did upon the Windmills—the only way to deal with evil is to sympathize with the soul of goodness, which somewhere or other must be hidden in the body of evil. Then when the good is recognized we hear the true music of nature, and know that

Such harmony is in immortal souls:
But, whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

To speak of the poetry of Shakespeare is

To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,
To throw a perfume on the violet,

and yet something must be added, for it is by means of his poetry that Shakespeare's soul rises to sublime heights, and (to follow out our simile) becomes merged, as it were, in the infinite Spirit of the Universe. Having regard to the nature and origin of the plays, it will readily be understood that this pure poetry does not characterize all that has been written by or passes under the name of Shakespeare, but in the works of no other writer will so much poetry of the highest quality be found. The reasons for this pre-eminence might be discussed in a thousand different ways, but two points must receive a moment's consideration.

All great art is spontaneous: it flows naturally like a river, and Shakespeare wrote with the greatest ease and facility. The quantity of work accomplished in so short a time, the carelessness of construction in many instances, and the disregard of all anachronisms and minor details, would prove this, even if these defects had not been pointed out by critics *ad nauseam*, from Shakespeare's day until our own. Jonson, that learned friend and rival, seems to have been considerably exercised upon these matters. But the advantages of such easy production go far to counterbalance any drawbacks, and a laboured composition can never compare with a free and untrammelled effort of art, where the inspiration is not fettered by the pre-occupation of the transmitter so to present his ideas as to do full justice to himself and his style. There cannot be great art without style, but an excessive devotion to it frequently defeats its own ends. Nothing can be better than the expressions used by Heminge and Condell in the preface to the First Folio. They speak of Shakespeare as of one "who, as he was a happy imitation of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it: his mind and hand went together: and what he thought, he uttered with that easiness, that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers."

One of the foremost characteristics of Shakespeare's poetry, therefore, is its naturalness, and this quality his art acquired because the sanity of his Soul was such that the Spirit of Wisdom could inform it to the uttermost without over-

taxing the intellectual capacity of his brain. Mr. Sidney Lee, in his "Life of Shakespeare," speaks of the naturalness of the poet with a felicity which is worth volumes of loose laudation. He says: "Each of his characters gives voice to thought or passion with an individuality and a naturalness that rouse in the intelligent playgoer and reader the illusion that they are overhearing men and women speak unpremeditatingly among themselves, rather than that they are reading written speeches or hearing written speeches recited. The more closely the words are studied, the completer the illusion grows."

The other quality of Shakespeare's poetry which must be alluded to, is its supreme sense of beauty. Beginning with sexual and sensuous beauty, it rises higher and higher, until at last it seems that there is nothing in the Universe which will not reveal some hitherto unnoticed loveliness at his magic touch. And the secret of true beauty is recognized from the beginning to the end of his works. In the song previously quoted from "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," Shakespeare tells us that "beauty lives with kindness," and it was by virtue of this universal kindness that he merits the title of the "gentle" Shakespeare. In the same play he writes:

Who by repentance is not satisfied,
Is not of Heaven nor Earth—

While in "The Tempest" Prospero says:

The rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
Not a frown further.

So that from first to last he never wavered in his message that

Pardon's the word for all.

This, then, must serve to give some idea of the Art of Shakespeare. The Universal Spirit of Wisdom and Love, breathing through the Soul of Shakespeare, invested it with a Sanity and Kindliness which manifest themselves in a Body of Poetry unequalled since the world began, for Naturalness and Beauty.

The evolution of Shakespeare is analagous to the evolution of the diamond. The dust of the earth produces vegetation: vegetation produces coal, and from this common material nature sometimes, by dint of pressure and stress, produces pure carbon, the glittering, priceless diamond. So it is with Shakespeare. This priceless diamond is the product of our English Elizabethan earth, and it is because we can, by the earthly bond of the body, sympathize with and enter into the treasure house of his Soul, that we are at last raised above and beyond ourselves into the rare and pure atmosphere of Spirit, and pass

To where beyond these voices there is Peace.

A FEW NOTES ON "HAMLET"

I N endeavouring to fulfil the very difficult task of analyzing one of Shakespeare's plays, I have come to the conclusion that the best way of using the space allotted will be to devote it to an elementary analysis of the scene-plot of "Hamlet"; because if the following pages are found to be of any assistance to the reader, they will serve as a suggestion for the similar treatment of any other play which he may wish to study. The figures in the following paragraphs are references to the lines as they are numbered in the edition of "Hamlet" published in the Chiswick Shakespeare. After having carefully studied the names of the Dramatis Personæ, turn to

ACT I.

Scene I.—Elsinore. A platform before the castle.
Horatio, a friend to Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, has heard of the appearance of a ghost, said to resemble Hamlet's father, the late king of Denmark, and although he discredits this rumour, he determines to watch, accompanied by two officers, Marcellus and Bernardo. The Ghost appears—there is no doubt that it is the apparition

of the late king. It refuses to speak when challenged. Horatio, much disturbed, agrees with his companions to impart what they have seen, to Hamlet.

Note.—The masterly opening, "Tis now struck twelve"—"'tis bitter cold"—"Have you had quiet guard," etc. The whispered talk about that "thing." The Ghost appears, and almost immediately vanishes. Then follows a long conversation. The attention having been rivetted, we are anxious to learn all the facts, so that the explanatory talk, which before would have been tedious, is now of the greatest interest. Note how effective are the broken lines (127 to 140) addressed to the Ghost by Horatio, and throughout, the many touches by which the sense of awe is created—such as the terrible stories of old Rome (111 to 120), the cockcrow, the silence of the Ghost, and the gradual approach of dawn described in the lovely lines

But, look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill.

A more dramatic opening cannot be conceived.

Scene II. A Room of State in the Castle.—Claudius, the reigning King of Denmark, is holding his court. Gertrude, widow of the late King and mother to Hamlet, has, with indecorous haste, married Claudius, and now appears in state as his Queen. Hamlet, still in mourning for his father; Polonius, the aged Lord Chamberlain; Laertes, his son, and certain courtiers are in attendance. An embassy is despatched to Norway,

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TITLE-PAGE OF HAMLET, 1605.

and Laertes is permitted to leave Denmark for France. The King and Queen expostulate with Hamlet upon his continued grief, and request him not to leave Denmark as he purposed, and they are delighted when he promises to comply with their request. The court is dismissed, and Hamlet is left alone. He is weary of life, he feels that the death of his father and the marriage of his mother will break his heart, but he must hold his tongue.

Then Horatio and his companions enter and tell him of the Ghost. Hamlet questions them narrowly, immediately decides to watch that night, requests his friends not to mention what has passed, and in addition to all other causes of anxiety now begins to "doubt some foul play."

Note.—How the magnificent lines upon life, death, and the respective duties we owe to the living and the dead, all help to tell the story (70 to 120). Hamlet's first great soliloquy (129 to 159). The intensely dramatic quality of the interview between Hamlet and Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo. The princely graciousness of Hamlet's welcome to all, and yet the distinction between that accorded to his friend Horatio (161), and to his acquaintances, Marcellus and Bernardo. The realistic way in which the narrators agree as to the main facts but differ as to details (240). Hamlet's cross-examination and unsuccessful attempt to catch them (229), and the gradual dawning of the idea that his father's spirit in arms points to foul play. Generally, consider the great number of antecedents and

important points which have been, without apparent effort, impressed upon our imagination, not by any wearisome insistence, but simply by their presentation at the right moment.

Scene III.—A room in Polonius's house. Laertes takes leave of Ophelia, his sister, and from their conversation we learn that she is beloved by Hamlet. Polonius enters, and after giving much good advice to Laertes, who departs, he questions Ophelia, finds out the secret of her love, and cautions her as to her future conduct in view of the difference in the social position of Hamlet and herself.

Note.—How Shakespeare deepens the ultimate tragedy by contrasting it with the delightful poetry and humour by means of which he frequently carries on the story. Laertes and Polonius give excellent counsel to Ophelia, and while we are impressed by the weight and wisdom of the speeches we cannot but be amused by the speakers. Laertes, the wild young man, preaches on chastity, and the garrulous old gentleman repeats lessons we feel sure he has never learnt from personal experience.

Scene IV. The platform.—Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus keeping watch. The Ghost appears. Hamlet recognizes his father. The Ghost beckons him to a more remote spot. Hamlet is held back by his friends, but breaks from them and follows the Ghost to

Scene V. Another part of the platform. Here, when alone, the Ghost tells Hamlet how, when sleeping in his orchard, he had been poisoned

by Claudius, and calls upon his son to avenge him, but in so doing, not to contrive aught against his mother. Hamlet promises, and the Ghost vanishes at the approach of dawn. Horatio and Marcellus enter, and are sworn to secrecy by Hamlet, who informs them that hereafter he may think fit "to put an antic disposition on." He is overcome by the thought of the terrible task before him.

The time is out of joint: O cursed spite
That ever I was born to set it right.

Note.—*Scene IV.* (1 to 37) How Hamlet endeavours to conceal the tension of his mind by rapid and brilliant talk upon topics unconnected with the matter in hand. (39 to 57) How the intense impression made upon Hamlet by the appearance of the Ghost is indicated by the stately and noble words he addresses to it—but, at present, he does all the talking—the Ghost is silent, and merely beckons with courteous action. (66 to 69) Although it is not fair to deduce an author's belief from the words he puts into the mouth of one of his imaginary characters, these lines would seem to assure us that the influence of Renaissance upon England was tempered by the Reformation and Counter Reformation. In Shakespeare, we get Art and Religion.

And for my Soul, what can it do to that,
Being a thing immortal as itself.

(70 to 78) Compare "King Lear," Act IV, Sc. vi. Shakespeare, in his provincial tours, is thought to have visited Dover. *Scene V.* The Ghost

speaks. Note the short opening words, "Mark me," and then the dull, sonorous roll of the long speeches with their incidental allusions to purgatory (10 to 20), lust (54 to 57), etc., which ultimately give us the impression, not that we are listening to a conversation, but rather that these stately periods represent the facts of the murder, filtering, as it were, from mind to mind, accompanied by the appropriate comments which would naturally arise. (170 to 173) As to Hamlet's madness. Surely, these lines tell us as clearly as words can, that Hamlet was not really mad. His quick mind appreciates all the dangers and difficulties of his task, and he decides that by assumed madness he will provide himself, not only with the means of gaining time to consider his best course of action, but also with a relief for his overstrung nerves.

ACT II.

Scene I. A room in Polonius's house. After a dialogue, in which Polonius despatches his servant Reynaldo to Paris with instructions to make secret inquiries and to report upon the habits and morals of Laertes, Ophelia enters in great trouble, and informs her father of a terrible interview she has had with Hamlet, who appears to be quite mad. Polonius at once comes to the conclusion that the cause of Hamlet's madness is his love for Ophelia.

Note.—This little scene affords humorous relief (lines 1 to 72), and, at the same time, gives us a further insight into the character of Polonius.

He evidently talks for the pleasure of talking. If he had thought Laertes would attach any importance to the good advice he had given him on his departure, he would hardly have suspected him of the conduct he suggests, while the gusto with which he goes into details gives us the impression that, though he talks about morality, he is really interested and amused with his own clever description of the ways of fast young men. (74 to 110) Note the way in which we are informed (*a*) that Hamlet has put his plan of assumed madness into operation; (*b*) how effectively he is carrying it out, and what we must expect when next he appears upon the scene; (*c*) that he realized how his terrible task would ruin the hopes he had entertained with regard to Ophelia. (110 to 119) Even after Ophelia's relation of the sad facts, Polonius gets interested in himself the moment he begins to talk.

Scene II. A room in the Castle. The King and Queen, alarmed at the conduct of Hamlet, arrange with two young courtiers, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to try and ascertain its cause, and this they promise to do. Polonius then enters, and having reported the successful return of the embassy from Norway, informs the King and Queen that, in his opinion, Hamlet's love for Ophelia is the cause of his mad conduct. He reads from letters addressed to Ophelia by Hamlet, and it is arranged that the King and himself will listen behind the arras to a pre-arranged interview between Hamlet and Ophelia. The King and Queen then go out, having seen Hamlet approaching.

During the dialogue which follows, Hamlet appears quite mad. Soon Polonius leaves him with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet, though still keeping up the pretended insanity, manages to extract from the courtiers the fact that they have been sent to him by the King and Queen. He is informed that a company of players are coming to the castle, and they shortly afterwards enter, escorted by Polonius. They are immediately requested by Hamlet to recite a scene, and he then asks the principal player if they can play to-morrow night a tragedy called "The Murder of Gonzago," and insert in it a new speech. They consent, and Hamlet, left by himself, explains what has been passing in his mind. He'll have the players play something like the murder of his father. He will watch the King, and then decide whether he can trust the Ghost, or whether his ideas arise from his own weakness and melancholy.

The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.

Note the insinuating manner of Claudius, here and elsewhere (lines 1 to 19). This may help to explain the infatuation of the Queen. (60 to 80) Relate the success of the embassy to Norway, and prepare for Act IV, Sc. iv. (86 to 168) Polonius does nearly all the talking; nothing can overcome his garrulousness and egoism. (170 to 221) Note the magnificent prose employed by Shakespeare in his later plays (see page 25). Line 185, Hamlet here—in lines 236-7, and in Act III, Sc. ii, makes use of obscene quibbles and snatches

of verse, quite at variance with his ordinary conversation—and Ophelia in Act IV, Sc. v, does the same. This habit is a frequent accompaniment of brain disease, of which Shakespeare had a wonderful knowledge. Therefore, when Hamlet feigns to be mad, he goes out of his way to introduce such matter to keep up his assumption, and poor Ophelia naturally utters scraps of songs which she had heard, but would never have repeated had she been in her right wits. (222 to 570) Hamlet's interviews with Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Polonius, and the players. Notice (a) how the pretended madness is made use of as a vehicle for the display of wit and philosophy; (b) the beauty of the lines (305 to 320) leading naturally to the introduction of the players; (c) the many interesting allusions to the Elizabethan Theatre in general (330 *et seq.*), and to the success of the companies of boy players in particular (341 *et seq.*, and see page 32); (d) how we are made to understand Hamlet's delightful nature—his wit, humour, kindliness, learning—and to feel how terrible is the task laid upon him, and how black the future must look to him. (575 to end) Hamlet's second great soliloquy. Compare with Act I, Sc. ii, before he knew of the murder and with Act III, Sc. i, where he contemplates suicide, and Act IV, Sc. iv, where he chides himself for his dilatoriness. These speeches should be studied together.

ACT III.

Scene I. A room in the Castle — The King

Queen, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Polonius, and Ophelia, hold a conference with reference to Hamlet. It is reported that Hamlet has interested himself in the players. The Queen hopes that Polonius is right, and that love for Ophelia explains his conduct. The King and Polonius hide themselves behind the arras, and Ophelia is left apparently alone. Hamlet enters, and in a passionate scene upbraids himself and Ophelia, and then bids her "farewell." Ophelia is broken-hearted, and the King, at the instigation of Polonius, decides that Hamlet shall be sent to England.

Note (Lines 31 to 34, 42 to 50).—Ophelia is a party to the deception practised on Hamlet. Having regard to her position at Court, and her love to him, she has perhaps neither ability nor desire to refuse, but it places her in a false position in the succeeding scene. (55 to 90) Hamlet on suicide. Christianity has deprived him of the Pagan way of ending his troubles. (83 to 88)

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all:
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment,
With this regard, their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action.

These lines help us to understand the eternal fascination of Hamlet. They not apply only to him but to most of us. (102 to 157) This is one of the most interesting and puzzling scenes in the play. Hamlet appears from the first to doubt whether the interview is not meant in some

way to entrap him. In the earlier part he accuses himself, but probably hearing some movement behind the arras he turns and sees Polonius. Then turning to Ophelia he puts the test question, "Where's your father?" "At home, my lord," she replies, telling him a palpable lie. At this he feels that even his love is false to him, and turning upon Ophelia he overwhelms her with reproaches. (158 to 169) Nowhere is Hamlet described in more beautiful and touching words than in these lines.

Scene II. A hall in the Castle.—Hamlet enters with the players, and instructs them as to the practice of their art. He then has an interview with his friend Horatio, and requests him to give heedful note to the conduct of the King when the play is being acted. He has evidently taken Horatio completely into his confidence. The Court enters, and everything is made ready for the play. Hamlet is hardly able to control his excitement. The play begins, and a scene is represented which exactly parallels the murder of Hamlet's father. The King, conscience-stricken, stops the play, rushes from the hall, and the Court breaks up in the utmost confusion. Hamlet, left alone with Horatio, exclaims, "I'll take the Ghost's word for a thousand pounds!" Horatio is bound to agree with him. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter, and Hamlet, knowing they only come as emissaries from the King, calls for recorders—asks them to play upon them. They reply that they cannot, when Hamlet turns fiercely upon them, asking if they think he is

"easier to be played on than a pipe?" Then comes Polonius with a message desiring Hamlet to visit the Queen, and on his promising to do so, he is left alone.

Note.—(Lines 1 to 50.) These lines form a compendium of the actor's art. It seems, at first, strange that Hamlet, having such business in hand, should interest himself with these art theories, but his gentle nature shrinks from the execution of the task imposed upon him, although I cannot see that he ever falters in his resolution to perform it some time. Here, as in Act V, Sc. ii, he welcomes "the breathing time of day." (59 to 79) Note the beautiful and exhaustive definition he gives of his friend's character. Note all through the play scene how Hamlet's excitement rises higher and higher, until after the exit of the King it quite overcomes him, making him hysterical and even affecting Horatio (296). (308 to end) Note the gradual cooling of the excitement in the talk with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and how in his just anger he almost forgets his simulated madness (380 *et seq.*), which, however, he resumes in a most outrageous manner when Polonius enters, and how, when left alone, he says he is worked up to do the deed if only he had the opportunity.

Scene III. A room in the Castle.—Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report to the King, and Polonius also informs him that Hamlet is going to his mother's room, and that he (Polonius) intends to conceal himself and hear what passes. The King, when alone, is racked by conflicting

emotions, and retires to an inner part of the room to pray. While thus engaged, Hamlet enters, and at first decides to kill him, but afterwards refrains from doing so.

Note.—(Lines 36 to 71) One of the most wonderful passages in the play. It has been questioned if these lines are really characteristic of Claudius. It is conceivable that he should wish to pray, and so the situation itself is effective and natural, but the intense power of thought and self-analysis revealed are more suggestive of the mind of Hamlet than of the King. (72 to end) These lines, on the other hand, if they are proper to the character of Hamlet, show him at his worst. One hesitates to discard them altogether, because he said of himself (Act III, Sc. i, 123, *et seq.*), "I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me. I am very proud, revengeful," etc. But we must remember that the play was built upon an older and more savage version of the story, and this passage may be, as it were, an outcrop from the bed rock.

Scene IV. The Queen's Closet.—The Queen enters with Polonius, who hides behind the arras. Hamlet joins her, and after some strong words the Queen calls for help. Polonius takes up the cry. Hamlet, hearing him, makes a pass through the arras and kills Polonius. He thinks for a moment it is the King, but lifting the arras discovers his mistake. The Queen cries out horrified at his rash act, and he replies,

Almost as bad, good mother,
As kill a king, and marry with his brother.

During the terrible interview that ensues, the Ghost again appears, but is invisible to the Queen. She thinks it is Hamlet's madness, but he undeceives her, and in the end, she admitting her weakness and sin, Hamlet relents, and when she says he has cleft her heart in twain, he replies:

O throw away the worser part of it,
And live the purer with the other half.

Note.—(Lines 20 to 34) The death of Polonius. The excitement of the play scene has worked Hamlet to such a pitch that he is now ready to carry out the injunctions of the Ghost. Thinking it is the King, he kills without hesitation, but then finds that the opportunity has not been given, and he is left alone with his mother. Therefore he is again reduced to words instead of deeds. (40 to 100) If this scene is read and thought about carefully, the relationship between the mother and son being constantly borne in mind, it becomes appalling in its intensity, and the entrance of the Ghost is not only a climax but a relief. (107 to 110) Hamlet admits that he has hesitated to fulfil the Ghost's desire, but remember the many excuses he had for inaction! (a) It was the death of his love for Ophelia. (b) Until after the play he had no evidence but that of the Ghost. (c) He was next in succession to the throne, and must not appear to murder the King, who had been elected by the people, and how could he prove that Claudius was himself a murderer? (d) How could he do anything effective without injuring his mother? (e) There were

complications in the relationship between Denmark and Norway. (137 to 179) There is no madness here. We feel that the scene should end with the line:

Thus bad begins, and worse remains behind.

Why the rest of the scene was left in is a puzzle.

ACT IV.

Scene I. A room in the Castle.—The Queen reports the death of Polonius to the King, who instructs Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to find Hamlet, and to bring the dead body of Polonius into the chapel.

Scene II. Another room in the Castle.—Rosencrantz and Guildenstern request Hamlet to go to the King.

Scene III. Another room in the Castle.—Hamlet meets the King, who tells him that for his own safety he must go to England, accompanied by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who are instructed to deliver certain letters to the King of England on arrival. When alone, the King admits that by the terms of these letters Hamlet is to be killed on his reaching England.

Scene IV. A Plain in Denmark.—Fortinbras, Prince of Norway, is marching with his forces through Denmark on an expedition to Poland, under the arrangement concluded by the ambassadors (Act I, Sc. iii). Hamlet, on his way to England, converses with a captain in the army, and afterwards soliloquizes on his position.

Note.—The difference between the conditions of the Elizabethan and modern stage must be remembered when considering these four short scenes. They presented no difficulty when the only notice of the change of scene consisted in the exhibition of a painted board, and they serve to carry on the story much in the same way as we sometimes need an explanatory chapter in a novel. The end of the third act is logically the end of the fourth of these scenes. Hamlet starts on his voyage, and an interval of time evidently takes place. Shakespeare takes advantage of this halt in his story to develop further the character of his hero, and the soliloquy of Hamlet (Sc. iv, 32 to 66) must be carefully studied, as it is one of the most subtle passages in the play.

Scene V. Elsinore, a room in the Castle.—Horatio informs the Queen that Ophelia is deranged, and shortly after, she enters quite mad. The King coming in sees her. When she has gone a noise is heard outside, and it is reported that Laertes has returned, and hearing of the death of his father, has incited the populace and is forcing his way into the palace. He enters, and the King explains that he is not responsible for the death of Polonius. Ophelia then returns, and Laertes is overwhelmed when he sees her pitiable condition. The King and Laertes are left alone, and the King promises Laertes that he shall be amply revenged.

Note. (1 to 74, 155 to 200) Ophelia's madness. See with what skill Shakespeare indicates the difference of the real madness of Ophelia

and the assumed madness of Hamlet. (75 to 96) The remorse of Claudius.

When sorrows come they come not single spies
But in battalions.

Compare with "Macbeth," where the relationship between the guilty husband and wife gives rise to similar pathetic touches.

Scene VI. Another room in the Castle.—Horatio receives a letter from Hamlet saying that his ship has been attacked by pirates: that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were able to proceed to England, while he had returned to Denmark. He asks Horatio to meet him.

Scene VII. Another room in the Castle.—The King and Laertes talk over the situation; a messenger brings a letter from Hamlet to the King informing him of his return. The King and Laertes then arrange a plot, whereby Hamlet is to be entrapped into a friendly fencing bout with Laertes. The King is to prepare a poisoned cup from which Hamlet is to be asked to drink, and Laertes is to poison the end of his foil. The Queen then enters with the news that Ophelia has, in a fit of madness, drowned herself.

Note.—The love of Claudius for the Queen (11 to 15), and of Laertes for his sister, are not incompatible with the most ignoble plot to murder. It is by means of these seeming inconsistencies of character (derivable no doubt to a certain extent from the nature of the material used), that the persons in any play of Shakespeare's ultimately become so lifelike. (167 to

190) Note the poetical beauty of the lines descriptive of Ophelia's death. The Queen is so sympathetic that we even sympathize with her, forgetting, for the moment, all that has passed. Throughout this scene the struggle of the guilty creatures with destiny is most impressive.

ACT V.

Scene I. A Churchyard.—Two grave-diggers are preparing Ophelia's grave. Hamlet and Horatio enter, converse with them, and withdraw on the approach of the funeral. Enter priests in procession, the corpse of Ophelia, Laertes and mourners following, King, Queen, and their trains. Laertes, overcome by emotion, leaps into the grave. Hamlet, discovering that it is Ophelia who is dead, leaps also into the grave, and grapples with him. The attendants part them, and Hamlet ashamed of his outburst withdraws.

Note.—This wonderful scene (a drama in itself) has already been alluded to (see page 98), but note how when the tragedy is drawing to its inevitable end the poet suffuses it in an atmosphere of humour, which, however, has not the effect of Ben Jonson's "humours," but of actual life. The two grave-diggers and Osric are delightful creatures, and I think serve to remind us by their presence, that even though the worst may happen, life will still go on. The necessary slaughter of the final scene is put into proper proportion by this means, and if we think of the last act of a play like Marlow's "Jew of Malta,"

for instance, compared with "Hamlet," the vast difference between the tragedies of Shakespeare and of the other dramatists will be appreciated. Although the physical horrors may be nearly the same in both, the former reads like a nightmare, the latter like a terrible transcript from life.

Scene II. A hall in the Castle.—Hamlet and Horatio are conversing when Osric enters, bearing the challenge from Laertes. Hamlet, unsuspecting, accepts, and presently the King, Queen and courtiers enter to see the fencing. The King puts Laertes' hand in Hamlet's, and the latter apologizes for his conduct in the churchyard. They then play, and between the bouts the King offers the poisoned cup to Hamlet, who refuses it. The Queen, not knowing the contents, drinks to Hamlet's success. Laertes wounds Hamlet with the poisoned foil—in the scuffle they change rapiers, and Hamlet in turn wounds Laertes. They become incensed and fight in reality. The King calls out to part them—the Queen falling, cries that she is poisoned. Hamlet orders the doors to be shut. Laertes confesses the conspiracy, and Hamlet stabs the King and kills him. Laertes dies, and shortly afterwards Hamlet expires in the arms of Laertes.

Now cracks a noble heart. Good-night, sweet prince,
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.

Note.—So ends the most remarkable and popular play in the world. Its popularity dates from its first production, but there is no doubt that Shakespeare from time to time altered and revised it.

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There's a divinity that shapes our ends
Rough hew them how we will—

and having thus admitted it, we can say:

"We defy augury: there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come: if it be not to come, it will be now: if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all." Then comes the end; and happy are they who, when their task is over, leave behind them, for their friends, some of the fragrant memories and tender feelings which, for all the world, cluster round the imperishable name of Hamlet.

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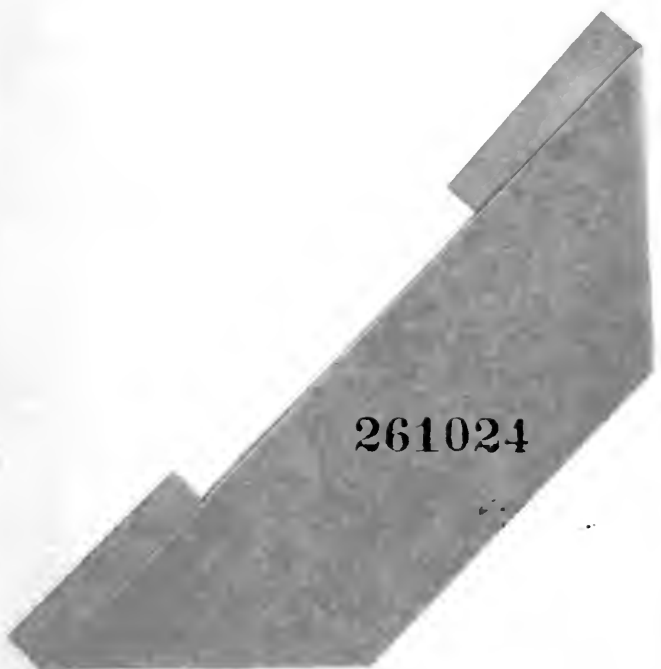
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